BLACKWOOD'S MAGAZINE

NUMBER 1632

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COMMENT

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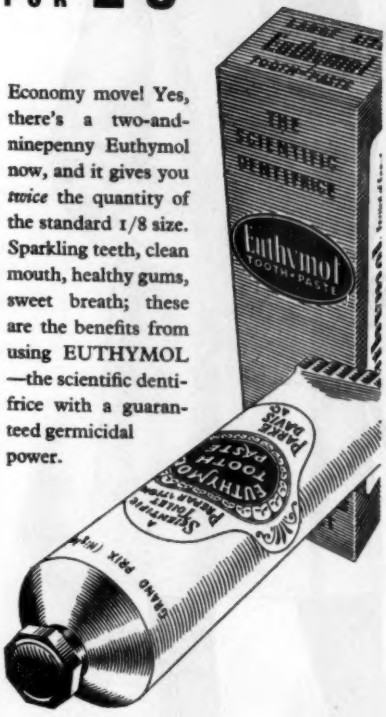

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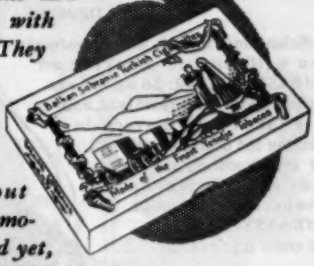

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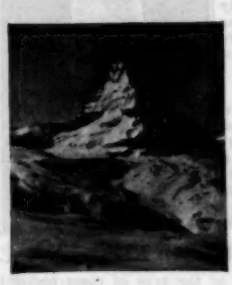

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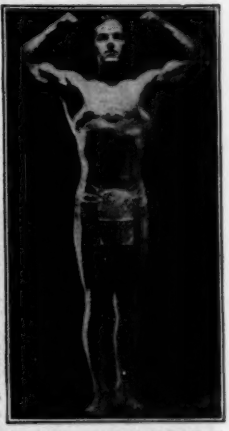

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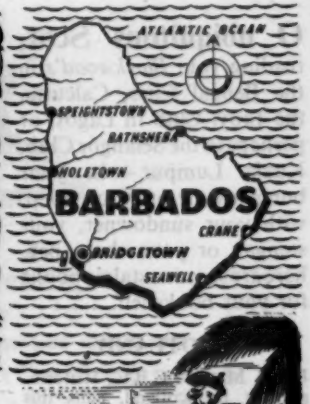

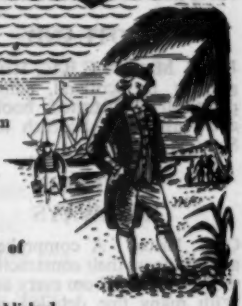

SUGAR: According to an old Polynesian legend the ancestors of the human race originally sprang from a sugar cane plant and it may well be that the South Pacific is indeed the place of origin of sugar, if not of mankind.

Sugar cultivation has however also been established in the British West Indies ever since the seventeenth century. Barbados — the oldest English Colony in the British West Indies — has always been among the largest sugar producers in the Empire, and today sugar is the most important industry in the island.

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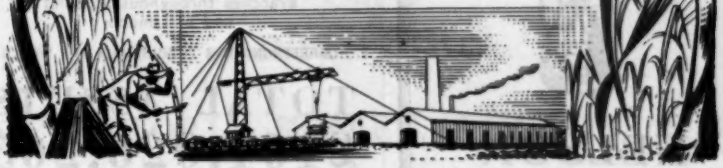

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"As a white candle in a holy place,
So is the beauty of an aged face.
As the spent radiance of a winter sun,
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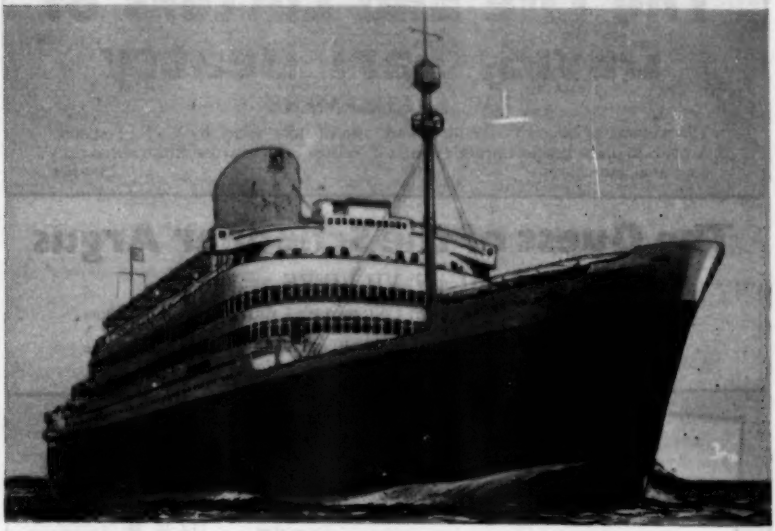

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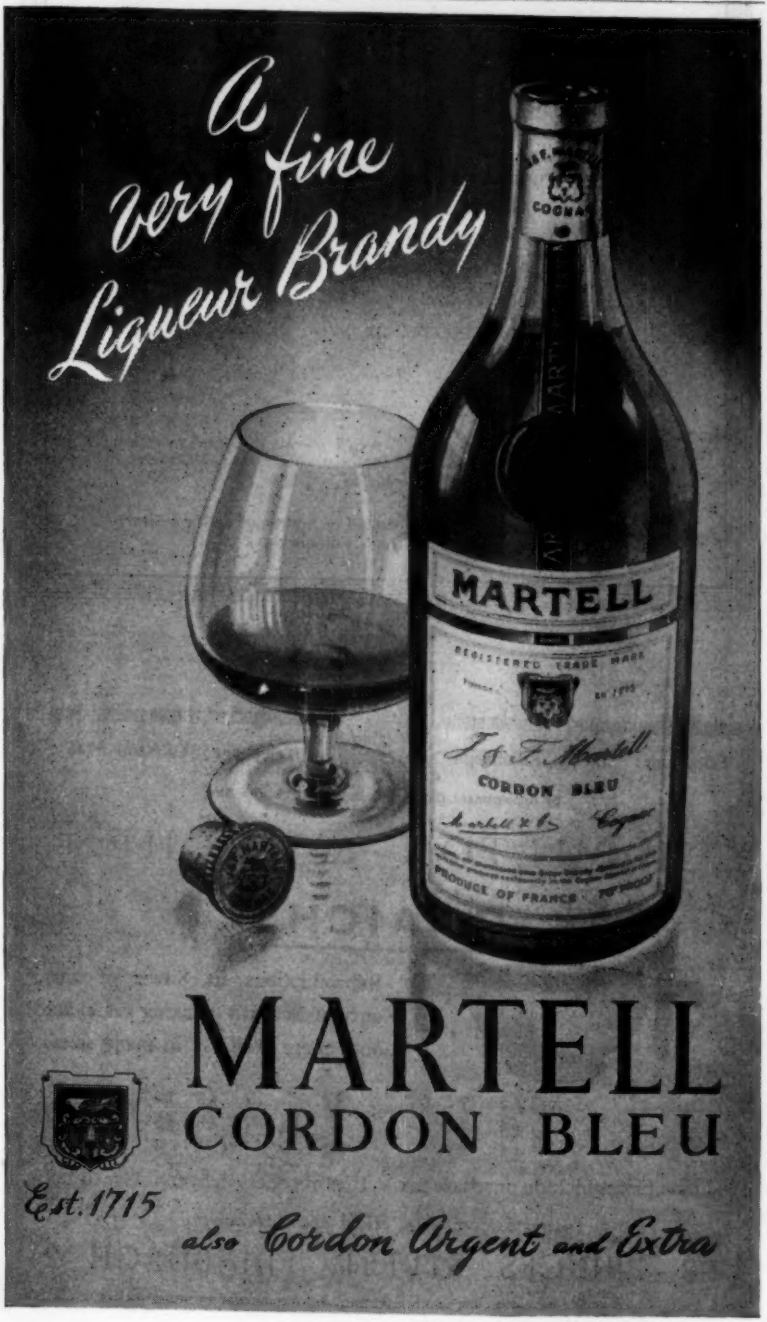
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BLACKWOOD'S MAGAZINE.

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CAT OVER THE ROAD.

BY J. M. N.

I LIKE cats, and the liking is mutual. They come to me unasked, and at various times in my life I have become hag-ridden by admiring felines. This happened more frequently in Palestine than anywhere else, where the odd, unwanted kitten lives in the gardens of Tel Aviv, Jaffa or Jerusalem; wild, secure lives, in pleasant flowery surroundings, fed from ample rubbish-bins.

One lovely tropical night when the flying foxes pelted in and out of the huge carob tree that stooped over the tiny cottage in the big orange garden which was my home for part of the war, and nipped off the sugary green pods that sprouted grotesquely from the monstrous boughs of the carob tree, dropping them with resounding thuds on the roof, April came out of the shadows. She came from my neighbours, the Bedouin; tip-toed after the manner of her kind; looked me over; disappeared; returned some hours later voicing that seductive call the cat tribe reserves for its offspring, and was followed by four large kittens! I called her April because she was full of springs. Her legs were shorter than most of her race and she covered the ground when in a hurry with leaps peculiar to herself. She was not the 'cat over the road.'

The story that led to the cat over the road began in the First World War with the exodus from Russia of thousands of the aristocracy. They scattered all over the world. One became my housekeeper.

At the very beginning of World War Two I left Greece and by gradual stages followed the misfortunes of the Poles who had poured into Rumania. Down through Turkey we flowed, to the little Turkish port of Mersine, and then on by way of Cyprus to Palestine.

I had visited Rumania first in

the gay 'twenties,' and I found it the same in the winter of 1939 and the succeeding summer.

Between the two world wars it still meant something to belong to a Great Power, even to a Power suffering from the questionable advantage of being the winner. It was Chesterton who, tongue in cheek, said the world was a place where England was found. He wrote when Empires took precedence of Ideologies. Wars enjoyed a certain popularity and the winner was not the loser, but annexed the territory of the defeated enemy. There was no such thing as an "international conscience." Nations protected their citizens, and if one disappeared swords were rattled, and sometimes blood was shed. Public opinion counted, and those who misruled us were easily shamed into action.

As wholesale assassination has become the prescribed order of our civilisation, it seems in order to suggest that the ordinary, much-exploited citizen could better this state of affairs by indulging in a well-planned minimum assassination. That is to say, kill off ten leading politicians in every country every ten years. This would be a small national sacrifice, and politicians would take a humbler and more correct place in our social order. The study of the politician from election to the grave would be interesting, and it would not take a Low to conjure up situations that might arise in the efforts of all to figure among the lesser brethren.

We might even return to the time when there was freedom; when men travelled and even found work in different countries; when passports were unknown, except for Russia and Turkey. It was an exotic adventure then to draw a passport. But those were the Dark Ages, and followed even darker ages when men had servants, and the servants worked in the same families generation after generation.

Countries went their own way, knew their own frontiers, and kept inside them. Living was cheap. Few people killed each other. Women were doers of good works, and an example to their children. They did not look like a Gauguin nightmare. There were no financial mazes or areas. Craftsmen could buy and sell where it suited them. Money was money. One merely had to possess it. It was international. It travelled all over the world carried by merchants, and even humbler people like beggars, and peddlers and cameleers. It was carried in pockets, and no man had to slit his camel's hump to hide his gold. Wars rolled over the old world, but trade was brisk afterwards. Countries recovered. Dark but proper times!

In those dark but proper times Rumania was one of the few countries where England was not "found." Rumania was run entirely for the Rumanians, and few ever desired to leave the easy life offered by their own country. We reached Constanza at dawn from the Black Sea. And what a dawn! What

tender, golden beauty burnished the glowing whiteness of the place! Michael was boy-king then and played away part of his summer on the beach at Constanza.

There were landowners, and princes, and peasants, and horses. There were flocks and herds. Fat geese gaggled in every ditch and field, their flock-leaders' children dressed to the heels in richly coloured embroidery. The pastures were rich, the peasants were rich, the Danube was rich! Everyone grumbled, of course; but that was the way of the world.

I was precipitated into this lush richness from the stark poverty of Greece. I was told that easy living made for decadence and that everybody was indolent. But everybody was happy! Landowners and peasants had a mutual pride in each other. A feeling of ownership. My peasants. My landowner.

Of all the princes and princesses there was one princess who shall be nameless; for I sincerely hope she has reached some refuge far from her own land. Her history is curious. Her father quarrelled with her mother when she was three years old. In a fit of pique he gave her to the gipsies. She was the only child and the mother's heart was broken. Long after her death the paternal grandmother traced the child to England and found her in an orphanage. She had a passionate interest in orphanages, and those she showed us in Rumania were happy places. She believed that chic reduced life's difficulties, especially in a colourful country like her own, and all her orphans had well-cut hair and clothing.

There was the fascination of the Danube—that mighty river sprawled half-way across Europe. There are little islands where one could buy contraband cigarettes from Greece; to which stole, in the dark of the moon, boats, with the poppy-juice milked by Bulgarian women in poppy-fields on the other side of the river. Flowers of paradise or hell, according to your belief. Attar of roses from the Vale of Roses in Bulgaria, each drop worth half a sovereign, when sovereigns counted. Official eyes were well veiled; official palms well oiled; everyone was happy, except the occasional scapegoat of some trumped-up charge occasioned by a sudden flare-up of public opinion.

The Rumanian gipsies were Europe's wildest. Men with long, uncut hair and beards; babies naked until ten years old; women like gaudy many-rayed flowers with wide, flowing skirts. And the wild gipsy music! Possibly the richest thing in rich Rumania! Music that seized on head and heels of dancers much more quickly than the wine that flowed so freely, and whirled them away. Its rhythm lilting, skirling, ringing through the senses in magnificent vibrations after the music has stopped, so that feet still leap and bodies whirl on.

Rumania, ablaze with colour

and larded with rich fare. Where else are there such strawberries? As Cyprus is the birthplace of the cauliflower so I do believe Rumania to be the birthplace of the strawberry; but unlike the thin, paltry Cyprian prototype of the cauliflower, still found in the heights round St Hilarian, the strawberry arrived in its full perfection. Hands thrust them fresh and sweet through the windows; they were hawked through the streets; cried through the cities; heaped in cream-topped piles on restaurant plates. There were frogs' legs, delicately fried; the livers of geese; fish, and flesh, and fowl; and caviare.

I often think of the Old Believers, who harvest the caviare, and wonder how they fare behind the Iron Curtain. Those strict, fanatical men with unshorn hair and faces, whose patriarchs look like dolorous spiders. The Old Believers, the Lipovani. Their way of life perhaps better than that of most peoples; for all the profits of their fishing go to the poor of their community.

The Old Believers were the persecuted of more distant days. In the seventeenth century the Russian Orthodox Church introduced certain changes which caused a split; the majority went over to the reformed Church, but a minority retained the old form of worship and called themselves the Old Believers. Being fanatical they soon became a thorn in the side of the reformed Church. Then began burnings, killings, exile; but nothing crushed them. Finally the Tsars took over Bessarabia and colonised a part of the Danube delta with Old Believers. Valcov, lying in the most eastern mouth of the Danube, became their capital. It was there that the caviare harvest was gathered when the river was in spate and the sturgeon running to spawn.

Russians maintain that Astrakhan gives the best caviare; but if there is a difference, only the most astute connoisseur could detect it. And caviare eaten to gipsy music in the *de luxe* restaurants of pre- and early Second World War Bucharest definitely had the advantage of caviare slapped on to small bread rolls and sold in the streets of Moscow. Valcov provided about half the caviare that whetted the appetite of the pre-war epicure.

Valcov stinks of fish. Everyone in Valcov stinks of fish; in a short time even the casual visitor. There is no other way to describe it. The river shore is lush with growing things. It is the paradise of every type of fish and frog-eating bird. They twitter, and clamour, and wade; fly in clouds from dawn to darkness; tread the air; thresh the river with junketing and plunging. Their droppings rain on tree and bush.

I never visited Valcov in the winter; but I can imagine all the birds gone and the river frozen to iron hardness; beaten under the frenzy of blizzards which rage from Poland and Russia, squealing from the

Caspian and heaven knows where.

The Old Believers have developed a curious form of fishing, or at least I thought so. The sturgeon is a fish with an itch. A perfectly terrible, insatiable itch. I was told he develops this as he feeds, which seems a strange trick of nature. He feeds grovelling in the river slime and fills himself on the little fish that live there. Immediately his dinner is over he must scratch, and scratch deep! He runs amuck seeking a scratching-post. The Lipovani have provided him with a special form of hook threaded out through the water and so arranged that, instead of giving, the hooks catch under his scales when he rushes on them, and his career in the river is over.

Another delicacy comes from the sturgeon. He is caught immediately after his dinner, and the tiny fish, no bigger than the Skippers of our youth, are squeezed from his belly, cleaned and sent off to the market in barrels of salt. A relish not to be sneezed at when washed down by the fiery spirit of the country.

But Rumania is far from the cat over the road; it is a pleasant interlude in memory, and one of those stages on the long, incredible journey taken each succeeding generation by those in flight from one form of ideology or another. The Old Believers; the Russians; the Poles; the Jews. All using the Green Frontier, passing by mountain, marsh, or river; reaching, in Rumania, a first glamorous stage in the bid for freedom.

It was in the third year of World War Two that I made my home in the big orange orchard on the outskirts of Jaffa, which belonged to the Russian Orthodox Church. It was a glorious place. Trees laden with golden oranges. Bananas. Holy date-palms growing round the tomb of Tabitha who was raised from the dead. The tomb was in the corner of the garden.

Water flowed about the garden at the will of Joseph, an Arab gardener. Besides Joseph and his brethren, thirteen in number, was Joseph's uncle and his brood; and there were other Arabs, all happy, all lazy. They were Christians when we ran about in wood. Original Christians; and they had lived round ancient Joppa before the days of the earliest Jews. However, this had no marked effect on their treatment after the war, or in the justice meted out to them by the Christian world, which until recent years would have fervently espoused their cause.

They were simple, kind, and friendly; they had a genuine warm sorrow for the homeless Poles. They were glad to see them enjoy oranges and sunshine in their garden. Their kindness was practical; for those with things to sell reduced their prices.

A Siberian family lived in the garden too. They had been

there since the Russian revolution, and the arrival of the Poles from Siberia wakened a great nostalgia for his country in the man's heart. He was less melancholy than most Slavs and had a harder edge. He yearned to return to Siberia before his daughter had grown too old to love the Steppes as he did. He even ached for the tundras, those evil, bitter places of literature, where the powers of darkness actually do seem to forgather, and from which those Poles who survived crept shuddering to Palestine when released by Russia.

Poles interested him enormously, and he spent hours talking to them of Siberia; but he saw it from an entirely different angle. For Arabs he had no use, or for camels, or jackals, or Bedouin. He viewed with disgust the large Bedouin camp outside our walls, from which the afternoon breeze smartly whipped up willywaws of dust. I remember his attitude when Joseph's uncle died of plague in our garden. We viewed his thin, twisted body together before sending for the police. Runnels of water flowed past him from Joseph's pump. Bulbuls sang in the trees. He died before realising how ill he was, twisted from the sharpness of his pain. He died trying to reach the tomb of Tabitha. So said Joseph.

A *cordon sanitaire* of Joseph and his brethren under an Arab Health Officer was immediately deployed round our walls, and so kindly disposed to us were they that they simply turned their backs if we wished to go in or out, and saw to it that we were in no way inconvenienced.

We were suddenly jolted from our war-time routine by the arrival in Palestine of a sort of travelling Ambassador from the Orthodox Church in Russia. The old Russian Patriarch had died and Moscow appointed a new man in his place. Orthodox circles held that his appointment was uncanonical, since it had been made without any reference to the Orthodox Churches outside Russia. We moved in and out of Orthodox circles in those days; for we rented many buildings of the Russian Orthodox Church for the Polish refugees.

The Russian community was made up of genuine pre-First-War pilgrims caught in Palestine; a permanent group of religious recluses; and Russian refugees, fled from the revolution. The very large Church properties were administered by the British Government in Palestine under the guardianship of the League of Nations. This property was extensive and valuable. It had not belonged to the Russian Government, but to the Tsars; to rich Russian families; to Russian religious societies. It was legally privately owned and had never been handed over to the Soviet Government. It was used for the benefit of the Russian Community in Palestine.

Immediately the new Patriarch was appointed troubled rumours disturbed the Russians in Palestine, and when the Ambassador

arrived excitement rose to a terrific pitch. The head of the Community refused to receive him, and when he finally penetrated into that worthy's office that small but peppy man pointed to the picture of the Russian Royal Family on his wall, crying, "I do not receive murderers!"

This, as the opening gambit, proved the final stalemate, and the Ambassador retreated rapidly.

He went into the Cathedral, perhaps to recover; but he found it occupied by the old cleaning women. Grim Russian *matoushkas*. Harpies with buckets and brooms. Spiteful harpies. Hissing harpies! He stood in a sea of swirling water and swishing brooms. The old women hissed and groaned as they bent over their brooms or wielded their scrubbing-brushes. Their floor-rags splashed him. He tried to pour out words to them of how they would work no more if they only joined the new Church movement. He finally called it a day and fled, and they sluiced, and rubbed, and scrubbed until they felt that they had purified the floor from the last imprint of his foot.

There were very few differences of opinion in the Russian community, but some there were, and among this scanty minority our Siberian friend received and listened to the Ambassador. Some of these conversations were passed on to us and caused us more than a ripple of interest.

After the war, we were told, when all the world was fired with a new friendship for Russia, when suspicions were buried deep under the bombed cities of our enemies, then the Soviet Union would press a claim for all Russian holdings throughout the world. This would include those in Palestine and those of Mount Athos. They would then bring about a renaissance of the Russian Orthodox Church. A group of young monks were being trained for the purpose. An army of monks! They would pour into Palestine; they would flow into Athos.

My home is on the frontier of Athos, and I could well imagine the feelings that would be aroused if the Russian properties were demanded. The huge monasteries and sketes could hold several thousand monks; could put up two or three thousand pilgrims. But I could not see any Greek Government giving way to the importunities of either Russia or her allies.

From Palestine to Athos is a cat's jump, but it took several troubled years to accomplish, and during that time the village I had lived in underwent a blood bath that began with my own household. The old Tower still stood stoutly out of the sea, but inside was a shambles.

When the war broke out in '39 we left it to the care of our Russian housekeeper and her son. She had been with us since her flight from Russia. A tall, amiable, cultured woman; wife of a Colonel, and mistress of several languages. We could

not visualise the place without her—her tall strength, her generous figure, a thought too stout for elegance; the masterly way in which she coped with succeeding waves of unexpected guests; her never-failing good-nature.

When I first met Madame S. she was in a bad way. Her husband had just died in exile and she could find no work in a world teeming with refugees. I had just recovered from having my house run by a Knight of St George, the actual Colonel who had surrendered Port Arthur to the Japanese. And I have always since known the reason why Port Arthur fell! I had vowed to have nothing more to do with Russians, but to steel my heart for ever against their charm. Then came Madame S. I, being weaker than water, took her on hearsay without even seeing her; but it was the best long shot ever taken in the dark, and she remained in our service until her death.

The Germans occupied the Tower until a few weeks before their régime ended in Greece. Just before they left there came to the village three people, a Russian doctor from Belgrade with his wife and small boy ten years old. He brought with him what must have been the contents of a large-sized clinic, including two X-ray apparatuses. They went into the Tower.

Ours is a poor world, and these people were charitably inclined. They found great scope among the sick for philanthropy.

They had come to our world unannounced, but one imagines with the consent of the Germans, otherwise how could they have travelled or settled into the place. Their coming roused great curiosity in our world. Some say they brought a trunk of gold with them and paid for everything in gold. Some say orders came from another country to get rid of the doctor; others say that he was carried off to the mountains to care for the sick in the Resistance groups; some say he was a spy. All the above factors seem to have contributed towards the final tragedy that overtook them all.

The brother of the doctor's wife was a bishop in the Orthodox Church in one of the European capitals which were occupied early in the war, and he, too, fled to Athos and for some time lived in one of the more important monasteries there. It is said that he suggested to his sister that they should leave Belgrade and occupy our house! One imagines that he must have had German consent to do this, and yet he had fled from the Germans. But nothing does make sense in a war. Madame S. never appears to have been consulted in the matter, and apparently knew nothing about the bishop or his sister and her family until motor-boats laden with their household possessions arrived at the jetty. She must have rejoiced, for it meant congenial companionship for her.

Two or three weeks before the British army entered Northern

Greece she and her son with three others were taken from the Tower and killed. It has always seemed to me that there was a subtle mysterious connection with this killing and the intentions of the Russians as declared to the Siberian in that garden in Jaffa.

Friends said we could never go back to the place; but after the keys were returned by the Greek authorities we decided to try.

I arrived at night in the few dark moments before the moon appeared. The Tower looked a monstrous shape as the boat slid to the landing. The jetty was ruined, and sea-storms had spread white sand where there had been stones. Nothing else was changed, except those who crowded to the shore to meet us. The young had grown old in the war years and the bitter aftermath; the old had died off; new generations trod on each other's heels; they had the faces and voices of children we had known.

Yannie, who took care of the ruins for us, had the keys. He helped me out of the boat. The straining crowd nearly pushed me over. Some wept. Children appeared to know me, and I suddenly knew what it was like to be a tradition. We streamed in procession towards rooms that had been prepared. Old, grimy rooms hastily whitewashed. As we reached the top flight of steps something hurled itself past me; something that was voiceless, and yet I could have sworn it screamed, and as my senses recovered from that bitter yell my flesh crept and I paused.

"What was that?" But Yannie had seen nothing, and neither had anyone else. I remembered the kindly ghost who had always occupied the Tower. How he climbed the stairs before the more important Church holidays and went into the little chapel where he had served through a long life. His skull was there in a tiny alcove on the top balcony. He stubbed a cross over the fireplace with his finger in one room, a cross that is there to this day and which works through each succeeding layer of plaster and whitewash that is laid over it. Igor Sikorsky, Russian-American of air fame, photographed it just before the war on its first appearance. He was on his way to offer candles to his particular saint at the skete of St Andrew on Mount Athos. I can see him now as he talked like one inspired in the firelight, and the dim impression of the cross showing on the white chimney. He was trying to believe in Munich; we could not; but how truly he summed up the position of the air defences of the various countries concerned for us!

This room received us. The lamplight showed the shadowy cross. The room looked like a garden after a wind-storm, but a feeling of content filled me such as I had not known since I left the place.

A fire bit into glowing logs.

A table was ready with a meal. Outside the sea sighed, and the moon suddenly poured down a brilliant white light as it rolled over the top of the Holy Mountain. How far from Rumania, from Palestine, from the Russian Garden at Jaffa; and yet how near! A hundred village faces peered from the dark shadows in the narrow courtyard, a hundred souls whose little world had been shaken with bitterness from "outside."

Later as I prepared for bed my flesh crept. The uncurtained windows looked down on lower levels of roof, and glaring up at me out of eyes that blazed in a gaunt head was the shape of a monstrous cat. My movement shocked it into motion, there was the same soundless yell, and it vanished over the roof like something over the edge of the world.

My third encounter was perhaps the strangest. I was in my bedroom looking over the tattered remains of books. The balcony door was open. In crept the cat, belly pressed to the floor. Foot after foot. She sprang to a chair; precariously balanced on the narrow-edged back; stretched her nose forward to twin holes that were in the door of a little cupboard. In these twin holes were twin splinters of wood torn into shape like half-wings of an airman's insignia. The cat looked as if gripped by some tremendous force. Then leapt high in air. Landed squarely on her feet. Vanished with the same soundless vibration-shattering cry that made me tingle. As I regained poise Yannie came into the room.

"Yannie, what are those holes?"

"Bullet-holes. *Na*, the place is full of them! There was scarcely an inch of ceiling without them. Victims were questioned here. One was a Greek officer who was parachuted in. They shot round his head to frighten him. Those are two of the holes. He was killed afterwards just out of the village. Another officer cried to the villagers to spread mattresses for him and he jumped from that window. The poor one broke his back; but they killed him too."

I went to the balcony to pull myself together. Glancing over the road I saw the cat of my various encounters. Indeed, a skeleton. Black, pointed with white. There hung to her as she walked a brace of tiny kittens, grimly determined on tugging a meal from her. As she walked, straddling first the one and then the other, she tried to twitch them off with her back legs, and, failing to do so, sat in the dust suckling them.

I asked, "Whose cat is that? Those kittens look as if they might be the grandchildren of my Angoras, one has the face of Sylvia, the mother of them all." My mind ran back to my pre-war cats: sleek, magnificent. I had never dared to ask their fate.

"That cat," said Yannie, "was the last kitten your

Sylvia had. In the year of the great hunger poor Madame S. had no bread, so she sent the big Angora tom-cat to the monasteries where they had more food. But Sylvia was a female and too old to move. The cat's father was from the village. Then Sylvia died and Madame S. kept the kitten, thinking you would like it. After she was murdered it ran round the place howling. How it cried! But we were all afraid to take it or feed it. In the end the woman over the road took it, which surprised everyone, for she is the kind that gives an egg and expects an elephant. Mean as a snake. It never came near the place again until we started to clean up for you."

Another interesting encounter took place in the kitchen.

My friends warned me that it might be impossible to keep a maid after what had happened.

"What of your daily bread?"

I waxed eloquent on the subject. I pointed out that the most average intelligence could cook. It was simply a matter of putting things together in certain prescribed ways. I warmed to my subject over breadmaking, and pointed out that it was the oldest culinary art in the world. In the most ancient times there was bread, leavened and unleavened. In simple tropical surroundings it grew on trees. I embarked on the Bedouin bread made from the tiny desert mesembrianthemum, which looks like a daisy. The daisy has a tiny hand that clutches its seed safely through dry months and years until rain or exceptionally heavy dews wet the hand and it swells until it opens and drops the seed. The Bedouin gather it still in the parent hand, scoop threshing pools in the sand, pack in the flowers and throw water on them. They gather the seeds when the pools dry. I dwelt on the finer breads of other countries until I reached the niceties of Paris and Vienna rolls. I finally said if village talent could not rise to my type of bread I would make it myself.

The only recipe book I could find was the British Army Catering Book. Everything in it laid down for units of 500 men! To reduce tons of flour to cups was beyond my mathematical powers. I finally set out with a sack of flour and that type of yeast which looks like shredded white ants' nests.

I decided to practise the mysteries myself before passing it on to those village maidens I hoped to make my slaves.

I achieved a lively mass of liquid after setting flour and yeast all night. Greatly encouraged, I added more flour to it. The catering book then said, "knead until well proven . . .," but yeast and flour in combination behaved like a huge animated, devilish ball of leeches. It squirmed and popped; it clung, and heaved, and stretched. If I tried to free one finger it gripped another. I was hopelessly

bogged. I toiled and fretted, and wrapped myself in strands of lively dough. It was like a Charlie Chaplin macaroni film. I could not reduce its size or shape; but it altered mine! I was beginning to wish I had gone into it feet first when in walked the cat over the road; eyes glittering; tail lashing; to my heated imagination she seemed quivering with scorn. She jumped on the table and sat down beside a large tin of margarine. In a flash the friendly comfortable face of Madame S. was before me, and reaching back into the past I saw her baring her arms, dipping into a tin of fat and greasing her hands well before kneading the dough. My troubles were over. The cat snarled as she got down from the table. I may add here that good as my loaves turned out to be I found every twelve-year-old village girl capable of turning out better bread than mine!

Does the cat over the road hold some clue? Has she bitter memories of events which led to the death of five people? Is she merely the recipient of impressions?

The more I ponder over the whole puzzle, the more wheels within wheels do I find. Remember the doctor fled from the Germans, yet he sheltered in the Tower filled with Germans. His brother-in-law fled from Germans and Russians; yet with the permission of the Germans he remained on Athos, and when for a few brief weeks Greece had a Russian Ambassador he travelled round the monasteries with him. Small things, but highly significant. Riddles that make no sense. Nor does it make sense that luxury-loving Rumania should be made a slave State; the Old Believers, Communists; or the Christian Arabs driven from the land that saw the birth of Christianity and cradled them from the beginning of time. Nothing makes sense but the cat over the road, who calls on me for her daily bread; sees to it that she does not become too friendly; remains in no room for more than a minute, and abandons each succeeding litter of kittens on my doorstep, doubtless with the astute remark, "In our world there is no better house!"

FALSE HORIZON.

BY OLIVER CASSELS.

"The rules wherewith he circumscribes his art outweigh the carps the angler snares thereby."

—THE PRECEPTS OF HU F'LUNG F'LI.

NATURE, ever concerned with the task of adapting her species to meet changing environment, abhors the average and insists that every being shall vary in some degree about that happy but unattainable mean we call the ordinary. She gives every man a kink; an abnormality all his own. The very few recognise and are prepared to acknowledge their aberrations; and these are the truly sane, the happy men of tolerant wisdom. The great majority, however, regard any departure from the conventional as something indecent to be hidden away; and they spend inhibited lifetimes endeavouring to cram their individualities into a common mould. Their divergencies in temperament and outlook are permitted expression only as occasional differences of opinion on matters that are concrete and therefore safe. There remains a handful of men who, utterly unafraid and convinced of the rightness of their ideas, feel impelled to uphold them at all cost and even to convert the rest of humanity to their point of view. These are the men who leave their mark in history: the unhappy men; the martyrs; the militant minorities; and the cranks. And it is through these that Nature attains her aims; though she bruise them to death in the process.

George Nilsen was one of the unhappy beings, and the kink that forced him to near-martyrdom was the conviction that he could hide from the world the fact that he had an artificial leg. The missing member dominated his life. Charles told me, and Ahlers told me, that he would never reconcile himself to the loss of the limb—and Ahlers, like Charles, was not the man to err in his appreciations of human motive. But I thought otherwise; and it was not until Ivette complicated George Nilsen's problem that I realised how completely obsessed he was with the illusion that he could keep the knowledge of his mutilation from us.

Poor George! When he comes to mind it is always as I first saw him; a tall thick figure clad in a loose grey suit, striding purposefully up the shady side of the Alcalá. The narrow white starched collar and broad-brimmed hat accentuated his stature, and the easy-fitting jacket did not disguise the power of his shoulders. Although his gait was confident and deter-

mined, he limped a little, and it was almost at once obvious that his right leg was artificial. There was no mistaking the lift of the body on the left instep and the slight upward jerk of the right shoulder and hip; made to permit the right shoe to swing clear of the pavement as the leg came forward.

Charles and I were sitting in Pidoux's bar at the time; drinking coffee after a belated lunch over which we had cleared up some small business matters before his departure from Madrid next morning. The streets were quiet; for every self-respecting citizen that could afford to do so was enjoying his siesta, and we ourselves were on the point of leaving with the same object in view. Charles noted my interest in the tall figure and turned in his chair to gaze with me through the wide plate-glass window behind which we sat.

"Well! What d'you make of him, brother?" As he spoke the man halted, looked left and right for traffic, and then stepped off the kerb to cross the street towards us. For a moment it seemed that he intended to enter the bar, but when he reached the near pavement he turned up the street again and as he passed the window we had a close view of his face. There was a look of physical strain in the set of his jaw and his pallid round features were beaded with sweat. When he had passed from sight Charles repeated his question.

"Elementary," I said, with decision. "He's a Baltic German with a sedentary job and his leg wants adjusting. Off at the hip, evidently."

"Two magpies and an outer," replied Charles. "As a matter of fact, he's a Swede who gets about the town quite a bit."

"Then you know him. Well, what about the leg?"

"The leg?" he answered. "What would you say if I told you he's the best watch-repairer and instrument-maker in the town?"

"I'd say the leg was working all right but the stump was giving him hell." Then, as an afterthought, I added: "Or does he walk at that pace for exercise?"

"You've made every guess bar the right one," said Charles, still hedging. "You'd better meet him and find out for yourself. You'll like him; he's excellent company. We'll go along and see him this evening." And all the way back to my *pension* I pondered his remark and wondered what there was to find out.

Charles called for me in the cool of the evening, and we walked down to Cibeles and then turned southwards along the broad double avenue that runs the length of the east side of the old city. In the shade of the farthest of the steel and concrete structures that had sprung up along this boulevard lay two small, low, whitewashed houses, built by an earlier generation and far better suited to withstand the summer suns and winter blasts than their tall neighbours. At the first of these Charles stopped and rapped with

knuckles on the front door; to be answered by a shouted invitation from an open window of the ground floor. We walked in and passed through the cool dark passage into a large well-lit room fitted up as a workshop.

"Sit down and keep still. I shall finish in ten minutes and then we will go out together." George spoke without looking up from the bench under the window at which he was working. His voice was full and pleasant and his English had little trace of accent. Charles obeyed the injunction and picked up a daily; thus giving me full opportunity to study the man. He was of our own age, in the middle thirties. Seen in his shirt-sleeves, he looked magnificently built; but the pallor of his clean-shaven features and the already apparent tendency to increasing weight hinted that his leg was an obstacle to the proper exercise of the big body. The head was small and well shaped, covered by thin, fair, silky hair.

He was working intently at the repair of a microscope and one could only admire the certainty and speed with which he effected his adjustments. The strong fingers handled his small tools with astonishing delicacy and precision. Instinctively my eyes fell to his legs. He sat balanced on a stool, with one foot crooked round a support and the artificial limb at full stretch before him. The trouser-leg was stretched tight and it was noticeable that, whatever its mechanical principles, the apparatus had life-like shape and did not betray itself through the cloth.

At last the adjustments were finished and the instrument packed into its case. Then, while George Nilsen wiped his hands on a cloth, Charles made the introduction, which was acknowledged by a smile and a nod. The hint that Charles had dropped at mid-day had made me curious about the leg, and I watched George as he rose from his seat. It was the casual movement of a strong man. Stretching out his left leg parallel with the artificial one, he placed both hands on the edges of the stool beneath him. Leaning forward, he raised his body on his hands and drew both legs backward till, with a little forward thrust, he transferred his weight to them. The manner of his rising was easy and natural and would have conveyed nothing even to an inquisitive mind had not another and more revealing action caught my eye. As he passed towards a door that led to his living-room, he paused to take a clothes-brush from a peg on the wall. The brush was poised in his right hand and it was evident that the traces of his work were to be removed from the left leg first. But even as the brush descended for the first stroke he hesitated. Then he transferred the brush to his other hand and proceeded to clean the right trouser-leg before the other.

It may be that a right-handed man will always brush his left

sleeve and trouser first; or that a one-legged man always starts instinctively on the clothing of the live limb. Be that as it may, however, the hesitation with the brush, momentary as it was, gave the clue to his self-consciousness. It also explained the manner of rising from his seat; the action was calculated to conceal his disability. An opportunity to test the issue presented itself as the three of us walked towards the centre of the city. Although we had the night before us, the evening was still warm and the distance considerable. As a prowling taxi with its flag up approached us, I innocently suggested we might share its cost. George's immediate refusal confirmed my conclusion that the false leg was always on his mind and that he intended to avoid any situation that might reveal its clumsiness.

Late that evening Charles and I, alone once more, were strolling homeward when he mentioned the matter.

"Well, what d'you think of George?" he asked.

"Interesting," I answered. "A good type. But isn't it time he dropped that play-acting about his leg? Everybody must know it's false."

"He'll never do that." Charles was very serious now. "The thing's gone too deep with him, and if I were you I wouldn't try to tell him."

"Tcha!" I retorted with some impatience. "That's just what no one has ever done. A good straight talk would cure the nonsense."

Charles made no immediate reply and for some moments we walked on in silence. Then he stopped abruptly and turned to face me.

"I don't think you realise how far he's carried the pretence," he said. "You don't want to believe me, but perhaps I can show you what I mean. Come along."

He led me down the hill to a small café opposite the *Continental*, frequented by the drivers of the taxis that stand across the way from the big hotel. We entered the place, and, speculating about his intentions, I sat down with him at a plain deal table.

"Bring along the bottle and a syphon." Charles spoke to the landlord, as was his invariable custom, in English; which he expected every Spaniard to understand. And, to give him and them their due, it was curious how little difficulty he experienced in getting what he wanted. Charles noted my astonishment when a bottle of a famous brand of whisky was placed before us. "Keep this to yourself," he continued. "The boss doesn't know how long it's been in his cellar, because he still charges only fifty centimos help-yourself."

When the drinks had been poured out he beckoned the landlord over to us again and, in a mixture of English and atrocious Spanish, asked him whether the Swedish watchmaker had visited the café that evening. As the man was genuinely puzzled by Charles's

performance, I translated some of the gibberish into understandable language. Suddenly the swarthy face cleared.

"Ah! You mean the tall man with the false leg." He lifted his own foot and pointed to it as he spoke. When Charles nodded agreement the man's face changed again and his expression spoke more plainly than words. "Then why didn't you say so at once?" was what he would have shouted had we been his cronies. Instead, he turned to me. "The man with the false leg!" he muttered. "*Es el unico que no lo quiere saber*—he's the only one who won't accept the fact." And with that he shrugged his shoulders and turned to go.

Even if Charles spoke no Spanish he understood a great deal, and now he smiled quietly to himself. But it was not until we were exchanging farewells that he referred to the incident. "Everybody else puts up with George's illusion," he said as we shook hands for the last time for some months, "so don't start monkeying with it yourself."

The more I saw of George, the more I liked the man. In spite of his seriousness and occasional fits of nervous moodiness, he was, as Charles had said, excellent company. Our common interest in all things Spanish led us to spend much of our leisure time together and our acquaintance soon turned into friendship. It had to be admitted that he managed the false limb extremely well and let it hinder his movements hardly at all. But at all times and in all places he continued to act the elaborate farce that he had two natural legs, and there could be no doubt that the attitude of his friends and the world at large encouraged him in his delusion. The Spaniard is too courteous and too much of a fatalist to point a finger at, let alone ridicule, affliction; and none of the race that we met in each other's company, whether socially or on business, ever showed by word or sign that he noticed the disability.

In spite of the general acceptance of his self-deception, however, the better I came to know George, the stronger grew the impression that his future happiness depended on the eradication of his obsession. So firm, indeed, did the conviction become that I finally decided that he would have to be disabused of his idea; so I began to seek an opportunity to start the treatment.

The propitious moment seemed to have arrived one evening as we were sitting at a table under the trees in the Avenida. Spring, long delayed, had at last come with a bound and all the city, with wife and offspring, was strolling under the lights, enjoying the mild night air. Two endless streams of animated humanity, each keeping strictly to its own side of the wide gravel walk, passed and repassed before us at an easy uniform saunter. George was in a pensive and receptive

mood that I judged well suited to my purpose.

"Half those people are only interested in the impression they're making on the rest." The opening was, perhaps, unsubtle, but I knew George well enough by now to realise that flank attack would never penetrate the crust of his self-satisfaction to the touchiness beneath. He made no reply, however, and left me to continue.

"When you come to look at them, the men are far worse than the women. Don't you think so?"

Again there was no spoken response, and a grunt was the only indication that he was paying any attention to what I said. He was usually quick with his answers and this made his silence the more disconcerting. I was hoping to guide a conversation, step by step, into the desired channel; but to do this some co-operation on his part was essential. After a moment's consideration it seemed best to continue the attack in the hope of drawing him.

"Look at that fellow in the fawn jacket." I picked on a flashily dressed youth in the passing throng. "His whole being is centred on himself and what the world thinks of him." I paused to give George another chance to disagree, which he would not, however, take. "Apache haircut; Hollywood moustache; and a bullfighter collar and tie," I went on. "American padded shoulders; Oxford bags; and Scotch brogues. And yet his body doesn't fill his clothes and he hasn't the muscular co-ordination even to walk properly."

Still he did not answer, but it was time to order another coffee to justify our continued tenure of the table and this provided the opportunity to break off my monologue. It had been evident, from the direction of his glance at the object of my scorn, that he was listening, and now a sullen brooding look settled on his face. His perverse dumbness had led me on rather quicker than intended, but it also gave hope that he had grasped the personal reflection in my remarks and that the medicine was working. His expression grew more sour as I watched him. If an explosion were imminent, it seemed better to hasten it by further brutality.

"If you want to bluff the world you've got to half-bluff yourself first," I continued. "And from that point the difference in a man's mind between the wish and the belief—between illusion and reality—is very small. That fellow over there is convinced that the glances of the girls he's ogling carry only admiration, and that proves, to his own satisfaction, that he's a handsome figure of a man. He'll even persuade himself in the end that his knees don't really knock."

As I finished, George sat up suddenly with another grunt and leant across the table towards me. At last, I thought, he had been roused and now it would be easier to bring the

matter to a head. But instead of the expected outburst his words were quiet and almost diffident.

"Illusion and reality," he said slowly; "those are the very words I have wanted for a long time to explain your own outlook on life. You have no illusions left to you and yet you run away from realities." He shook his head sadly as he added: "How grey and without colour it must all be."

It would be idle to deny that his words took me aback and threw me completely off balance; and it required some moments to regain connected thought. The suspicion that he was leg-pulling was dispelled at once by a glance at his face; and there appeared to be, therefore, only two possible reasons for his counter-attack. If he were retaliating, then my immediate object had been attained and the issue could safely rest until human nature forced him—as undoubtedly it would—to re-open the matter. Had he, on the other hand, taken my remarks as mere cynical gibing, then I could equally afford to await the opportunity for making a fresh approach. For the present it would be interesting to explore his mind for the causes that had led him to make his statements; and how better than by maintaining silence and allowing him, in his turn, to commit himself.

"You are not angry, no?" George was now even more diffident. He had misinterpreted my thoughtfulness and I had no immediate intention of removing his doubt. "If I was not so much realist myself," he continued to my amazement, "I would never say these things to you; but I think it may help to make you less hard. Charles is just the same. Like every man who has fought through that dreadful war, you cannot be normal. You have seen too much."

It was his turn to wait for a reply; but, even had the wish been there, my mind was too occupied with the revelation of these unsuspected characteristics to find words to answer him.

"That man you were laughing at," he went on; "he is more realist than you. He knows he has bad physique; otherwise he would not hide it behind those clothes. He thinks he looks like a million dollars"—he had learnt that expression from Charles—"and so he feels like them. He has illusions and is not afraid to live them. He is getting the best out of life in his own way. Would you make him accept he is a weakling and sit at home ashamed to be seen?"

He paused again, and it is probable that he was weighing my silence as I had weighed his some moments before. His conclusions must also have been the same; for he continued with renewed confidence.

"You have experienced all the emotions and there is nothing left that is new to you. You are burnt out. There is no illusion for you that has not

been broken and you are frightened of a reality in case it turns out to be another illusion. So you run away from both. If life forces some unpleasant thing on you, you accept it without a fight. Just grin and bear it. You are like an empty bag."

George sat back in his chair with a final grunt and drained his coffee-cup. But if he expected me to argue with him, he was to be disappointed. It now seems obvious that his outburst was a compound of self-defence and accusation directed, not at myself, but at some long-buried element in his own mind that my remarks had laid bare. Looking back, I realise my earlier tactics had succeeded beyond expectation and that this would have been the crucial moment to press home my own attack. He had thrown off all his usual reserve to speak as he did and his defences were down. But no other man's motives or inhibitions are ever one whit as interesting as the analysis of one's own newly discovered failings, and, absorbed in an effort to assess the amount of truth in his assertions and find the grounds on which his impressions were based, I let slip the only real chance that ever came to speak frankly about his leg.

We sat on without talking; I, by my silence, taking unfair revenge on the uneasy George, whose anxiety to know the quality of my reaction to his broadsides became more and more apparent. At last he could stand it no longer.

"Come on," he said abruptly, rising from his chair and cramming his broad hat on his head. "We go to the Café del Correo. Some friends of mine whom you do not know meet there and I have not seen them for too long." And, wondering just how much further he proposed to commit himself, I followed as he stumped along the gravelled way towards Cibeles.

Whether, by meddling with George's complex, I was responsible for subsequent events remains a matter of conjecture; it is more comfortable to think an inevitable process was merely hastened thereby. But there can be no doubt that it was our conversation that caused him to visit the Café del Correo that night, in order to meet Ivette again. That Ahlers was there also was only the flick of chance that enabled me to piece together the man's whole story.

The café was tucked away in the gardens at the side of the great modern post-office building whose walls shut out the noises of the city. The Spaniard insists on seeing and being seen by as many of his fellows as possible; thus the place was little frequented, and it was here that a small circle of independent minds used to meet to drink beer and discuss affairs. The rules of membership of this informal club, put to me at once, were very simple: the only condition of entry was introduction by a member; the only requirement, a sincere regard for Spain and the Spanish; the only prohibi-

tion, any form of criticism of native manner or custom.

Ivette was an alert and quick-witted Frenchwoman whose clear-cut features softened into attractive homeliness as she greeted George. Ahlers, whose personality I instinctively trusted, was a shrewd yet jovial Swede whose business brought him but occasionally to Madrid. George's attitude towards the man was strangely hostile, and it was very noticeable that he deliberately omitted him from the formality when he introduced me to the others. But he was not content merely to ignore his countryman. Whenever I attempted to start a conversation with Ahlers, he immediately cut in pointedly with some entirely different topic. The Swede appeared not to notice the other's rudeness, but my own discomfort must have been shared by the Frenchwoman, who was also evidently trying to hold George's attention. At last she put an end to a strained situation by rising and asking him to escort her home. At first George looked rebellious, but when the request was repeated in firmer tones he also rose to go, meekly enough.

The gathering broke up some time later, and, under the circumstances, I was glad to accept Ahlers's suggestion that we should walk together to his hotel for a last drink. As soon as we had left the others I apologised for George's behaviour, but he cut short my explanation with a laugh.

"How long have you known George?" he asked. "Two months? You shouldn't worry; I've known him for thirty years. That's why he dislikes me." We crossed the square and were safely on the pavement again before he went on. "You see, his family and mine are neighbours in Sweden. We had had no word of him for years when, quite by chance, I came across him here in Madrid. He hasn't forgiven me for finding him."

"What's the trouble?" I demanded. "He's not hiding, is he?"

"Burying himself, perhaps," answered Ahlers. "He's got nothing to hide except that leg of his, and that seems to be the cause of all his difficulties."

We walked on slowly, Ahlers deep in thought, and it was some time before he spoke again.

"You say you met him two months ago," he went on. "It's about that much since he last called in at the Correo. Tell me, has he ever mentioned the girl to you?"

"You mean Ivette?" I answered. "No, never a word. But I must say his nerves have often seemed on edge. Is there anything between them?"

"I gather there was," replied Ahlers. "But he appears to have dropped her suddenly, without any explanation. It's quite a habit with him. He did the same thing to his family and friends after his accident. He just disappeared without as much as a good-bye."

"So it was an accident." My curiosity was whetted. "I'd

be very interested to know what happened."

"George was a sailor," Ahlers continued. "He served his apprenticeship in sail and loved the life. His heart and soul were in ships and the sea. And what a tremendous fellow he was—well, you can imagine him fourteen years younger and really fit. To lose a leg must have been the devil of a shock to the man. It was someone else's criminal carelessness with a twelve-bore while he was home on leave, and, of course, what was left of the leg had to come off."

We entered the hotel where Ahlers was staying and sat down in the lounge. He beckoned a waiter as he went on with his story.

"When George came out of hospital his people were full of plans for his future. They wanted him to settle down to manage the family estates, and when he refused they offered to put him into a shipping firm. But he would have none of it. Instead, he did three years in the instrument shops of a factory near his home—he was always handy with his fingers; I suppose sailors generally are—and then, one day, he cleared out."

"Then you think he deliberately chose to learn a trade that would support him in any part of the world?" I asked. "What d'you think the motive was?"

"Don't ask me that," replied Ahlers, "because I don't know and he wouldn't tell me. He became more angry than ever when I tried to get it out of him. But remember I lost touch with him years ago; you should be in the better position to answer the question."

"Personally, I think it's a kink," I told him. "There can hardly be any other explanation for his attitude to life."

"A kink?" For a moment Ahlers was puzzled, but his face cleared at once. "Oh! You mean some enthusiast slapped him on the chest as he came out of the anæsthetic and told him they'd fix him up so no one would ever know he'd got a wooden leg?"

"Exactly. That's just what might have happened," I answered. "And the effect on a man in that state could be very lasting."

"True enough," conceded the other after a pause for thought. "But then, on the other hand, he may only have been wanting to escape from a surfeit of sympathy; or it might be that pride and independence forced him to start afresh."

"Those must undoubtedly have been contributory causes," I replied, "but it seems most unlikely that they would, by themselves, have led the fellow to such extreme and final action. No! I'm convinced he thinks he can hide his artificial leg from the world. And I'll go further and say he chose his present trade so that he could tinker up the damned thing till it worked well enough to suit his purpose."

"I can't quite believe that." There was doubt in Ahlers's tone, however. "And yet your

suggestion is no more outrageous than his behaviour," he went on. "But, as it is, there's nothing we can do about the whole matter."

"I think there is." I took him up quickly. "He's bound to find out eventually that everybody knows about the leg; and the sooner he's told he's fooling no one but himself, the more hope there is of turning him into a normal human being."

"No, no, no!" It was Ahlers's turn to be decisive and there was no doubt about his alarm at my suggestion. "You must not do that. He has chosen his manner of living and it would be wrong to try to alter it unless you can put something there in exchange. I have not even told his family that he's here. They would only attempt to get him home, and that would send him packing to some other country. While he's here I can keep an eye on him."

Although I could not agree with Ahlers, it seemed best to let the matter rest there; after all, George's leg was not my affair. Further discussion could lead nowhere; so, after some exchange of generalities, I departed. But before I left he insisted on an assurance that George should not be told of our conversation.

Had there been the least suspicion in my mind on leaving the hotel that George was on the look-out for me, the side-streets would have provided escape; I had had enough of his affairs for one evening and wanted to be alone. As it was, he accosted me half-way down the Alcalá. It appeared that, after accompanying Ivette to her *pension*, he had returned to the Correo to find us all gone and that his conscience had then told him where to find me. He was in a glum, morose mood and at once launched himself into a vicious attack on Ahlers, warning me to place no faith whatsoever in his morals or opinions. My patience was exhausted, and when he finally realised that I was in no mind to listen to his outburst, he became apologetic and begged me to walk with him along the Avenida. It is unlikely that even my own insatiable curiosity about the man would have led me to agree to accompany him, had it not been for an uncomfortable feeling that my actions alone, earlier in the evening, were responsible for his present temper.

There were now few people about and we had no difficulty in finding an empty table. When we were seated, he took off his hat and wiped the sweat from his forehead. As he looked at me I saw that his eyes, unshadowed by the wide brim, were those of a tired and unhappy man. A sudden sympathy for him flooded through me, but even the presentiment that he was about to confide in me did not prepare me for his next remark.

"I think I will commit suicide," he said quietly.

It seemed probable, at the time, that he meant it. His was no mere manner of speaking,

no theatrical threat; it was the plain statement of a man to whom the problem of life, for the moment, appeared insoluble. I groaned inwardly and felt a drop of moisture trickle down my back beneath my shirt; it would take an hour's hard talking to dispel his mood and the night was warm. But too often already had he shown that patience was wasted on him and that only the most direct shaft would penetrate the crust of his egotism; therefore I wasted no time or energy on subtleties.

"Have you been quarrelling with the girl, George?" I demanded. He only shook his head. "What's the trouble, then; has she jilted you?" I went on; but again he shook his head.

"She won't; that is the trouble," he answered. "She still wants to marry me. For three months I have kept away and not seen her, hoping she would forget. But now she says she knew I would come back to her."

"Tcha!" I could not repress the exclamation of impatience. "Running away from your realities and letting her take the responsibility; is that it? What's stopping you now—finance?"

"No, it is not that," he replied. "She has planned for us to go to Paris, where there is much more work for both of us, and her parents have offered us room in their house."

Da Dios nueces al que no tiene muelas—God gives nuts to the toothless. For the moment I had no words. Here, to the mere masculine mind, seemed to be the solution of all George's difficulties; and yet it was typical of the man that he should hatch out some factor to limit his luck. Only the sight of him slumped in his chair urged me to continue the inquisition.

"If you don't want to marry her, why not tell her so at once and make an end of all this fiddle-faddle," I said at last. "You're hardly being fair to the girl, are you?"

He looked at me across the table and there was utter hopelessness in his face. "You do not understand," he said slowly. "You have everything to give, but I could never offer myself to a woman."

Of a sudden, the truth dawned on me. From the start I had been at a loss to account for his black mood, and his answers to my questions had only added to my bewilderment. But now I found myself biting back a smile from my lips. His leg was the cause of it all. I had not thought it possible that he could carry his delusion to this length; nevertheless, he was under the impression that he had kept the secret from the girl and his depression was due only to the fact that he could not bring himself to confess it to her. Unwittingly, he had made my task easy; for he had manœuvred himself into the very position I had always wanted. The cure for all his troubles lay in my hand, and this time the opportunity would

not be lost. But confession must be wrung from him before the remedy could be applied.

"You speak as if you were a cripple," I said. Even in his present state he needed a sharp goad.

He looked at me again before he spoke. "I am," he answered, and the tone in which he said it dictated my next move. He expected me to be astonished at the statement and I raised my eyebrows in simulated amazement. Satisfied with the effect of his bombshell, he went on. "You may have noticed I walk a little stiffly," he said. "You are the only one I have told and you must keep it to yourself. My right leg is artificial."

At last he had said it. It now required only a word to cure his aberration and sweep from his harassed mind the burden of his delusion. But another glance at the figure hunched up in the chair made me wonder at what cost he had brought himself to share the secret, and a disturbing doubt took possession of my mind. Here was a man who had cut himself off from homeland and friends and who was now prepared to sacrifice his chances of happiness in order to hide a crippling mutilation from the knowledge of the world. What was the value he placed on his pretences and what the price of relinquishing them? And what would be the effect of proving to him that they had fooled only himself? As I gazed blankly across the wide roadway to the gardens beyond, the answer seemed to spell itself out in electric lights against the dark trees of the avenue. Ahlers and Charles had not been wrong: I must not do it. I was not the judge and by no right dare I risk the cruelty of bringing down in ruins the careful edifice of his self-esteem, only to test the wisdom of a personal conviction. Nor would the woman who loved him wish me to send him to her by this means. Only he could tell her; in his own way and by his own will.

I did not attempt the impossible task of persuasion. His mind was made up and the confession of his pretence showed me that he meant to cut himself off once more from his friends. He had waylaid me not in order to enlist advice or help, but only to satisfy some last need for self-justification before he disappeared; and now he wanted no more of me.

That was the last I ever saw of George. He gave no heed to my farewell and I left him, still slumped in his chair, gazing blankly into the night.

DOG TRIAL BY JURY.

BY J. K. STANFORD.

In our age of ballyhoo, when one sometimes wonders if most of the values acclaimed by the world are real, it is refreshing to attend a gun-dog trial. The spectator is not encouraged to applaud. The 'gun,' however important he may think himself, is merely an accessory before the fact. The dogs, whose form is under scrutiny, are quietly assumed to be guilty, until they prove themselves innocent. There are not, as in horse-racing, any artificial handicaps, or betting, or public excitement to veil the object of the exercise, which is to discover the best retrieving dog.

On an ordinary day's shooting, the dog, and his owner, do their best or worst in some remote corner, seen only by their nearest neighbour, unhampered by casual spectators except sometimes at the first stand after luncheon. At a field trial the crowd is a recognised thing and may be of any size. The shooter may well have to take difficult chances, conscious of an array of silent and critical onlookers, massed on a flank with programmes, lynx eyes, and even field-glasses. He feels as if he was on a centre-court, and not only the duffer knows how easy on such occasions it is to miss the simplest smash or stop-volley. And in an age of hurry and incompleteness, he may well have to walk very slowly through sixty acres of roots, or sit in them for an hour on a shooting-seat, hoping most sincerely that the galaxy of champion dogs all round him will sooner or later bring to hand the birds he shot twenty minutes before.

What the dog feels I cannot guess. Motored from his quiet kennel to these affairs all over the island, and suddenly enlarged to show what he can do on a bird he may not have seen fall, even a champion retriever must, I sometimes fear, feel like an accused person in a dock, facing judge, jury and a gaping crowd, and with no one to help him unravel in his own favour a tangled web of evidence.

My own experience of field trials in 1950 was on a gradually ascending scale, first as spectator, then as loader, and finally as a 'gun.' I went to the first trial because an old friend had come four hundred miles to run a dog called Jasper, which had recently, so they told me, won no less than four 'open stakes.' It was a delicious October morning, and I began by standing in a long and gossiping crocodile of spectators, among the rushes and sedge-beds of the Test, trying to see what was happening in the 'Water trial' which began the day. Somewhere in front of us the guns were in-

visible. We saw a few birds, partridges and an odd pheasant, cross the valley, but fewer still seemed to fall. At the end of the drive we moved across the stream and I found myself alongside an old acquaintance, Mr H., who is headmaster of a sort of canine Eton for blue-blooded gun-dogs near Newbury.

"How did you get on?" I asked. "We couldn't see anything from where we were."

"We weren't so bad," said Mr H. "We" (the handler and his dog often use the editorial we) "had one easy one and the other was lodged in a tree, so we didn't disgrace ourselves!"

It was nearly an hour before I came across Jasper and his owner. We had spent the interval in the crowd slowly moving across some water-meadows behind the guns.

"How goes it?" I said.

"We've been on the line over an hour," was the reply, "and the only job we've had was a rabbit in the open fifteen yards in front of us. It was so obvious that Jasper simply couldn't believe that was all he had to fetch. I had to send him out three times!"

I felt for Jasper because rabbits are to a good gun-dog like the nursery toys which are put away sooner or later for ever, if not forgotten. And a field-trial champion has to have not only a needle in his nose and that sort of temperament which will bring out all his keenness and drive, and a certain competitive spirit in front of a crowd, but he needs also sufficient phlegm to endure long cold waits in the wings before he gets his cue. In a tennis tournament you may see prospective lady champions knitting quietly on such occasions without a glance at what their rivals are doing on the court. Dogs do not knit, but their owners, in the dreary intervals of waiting, exchange much scandal about other people's dogs and the incomprehensible way their own darlings have been 'put down' in the past by bad luck or unjust judges. (Mothers, at a pony show where their children are competing, are nothing to them.)

The 'degenerate' Goddess of Field Sports has never yet been wedded with suitable publicity, as we found that day. An attempt was made in the next drive to film the operation with a black-coated 'movie technician' perched on top of a van which was parked in the lee of a wood. In front of him stretched a line of very large pulpit-like butts concealing the guns, their loaders, a judge, and the handlers and dogs allotted to each. The spectators were massed on the opposite flank of the line. In theory the partridges, encircled from the next few fields, should have crossed the line of butts and been dropped into a little wooded belt behind them.

One of the spectators chanced to be an elderly ex-Colonel of the Indian Army. He had shot wild game, as I knew, all over India, game which had never known keepers, in places where,

when you attempted a drive, you crouched in a bog or all among the leeches in a buffalo-wallow.

"I suppose," he said to me, "the idea is to drop them in that wood. But I can't really see anything much coming to this array."

Nor could I. Nor could the partridges, though there were a lot in the drive. In fact we in the grandstand, as it were, could see them getting up far away on the flank and coming vaguely forward, but once they reached our field, and saw the massed preparations waiting for them, they had had enough. There were wistful and envious glances from us in the wings as partridges came rattling and curling over our heads, glorious shots all of them. One gun at the far end of the line did indeed, to use the current jargon, 'manage to connect' with a partridge breaking out, and dropped it like a cricket-ball on the camera-man, perched atop of his van, *in medias res*. There was a slight commotion, and I do not think the projected film ever reached the silver screen. But that was all.

I had to leave early that day, so could not see what happened, but I made my friend promise to bring Jasper down to stay with me for the International Trials which were shortly being held at a place called Druid's Lodge. In due course they came. In point of fact, Jasper arrived three days early, accompanied by a large sack of raw horse-flesh and a blue-roan spaniel named Smut, as a sleeping companion, to prevent him from pining in his master's absence. With some misgivings I introduced the dogs to a loose-box in the stables, though I had reason to believe that, at other tournaments, both shared their master's bedroom in exclusive hotels.

"Remember that dog's worth £1000," said the owner before he departed to London.

I had harboured many dogs in my day but never such an 'Old Master' as that. Whenever I took Jasper out for exercise, I was terrified lest he should be stolen, or poisoned, or blunder into a trap; lest he should rip himself by jumping a barbed-wire fence, be seduced by one of the village dogs, or, worst of all, chase one of our local hares over the horizon of Salisbury Plain and break his training finally and for ever. For my own dog, a spaniel called Ruin, believed in free enterprise, and when out for exercise, as a 'smell-dog' with an exceptional nose, liked to give rein to his undoubted talents. Some dogs run in, as certain humans take to drink, only occasionally, but with dreadful results. And had not Jasper's owner said to me, more than once, "You know any B.F. can ruin a decent dog in about half a day, when you've spent months on him."

The day before the Championship the owner returned. He said to me, "Look here, I want to sharpen Jasper up. He's too fond of trying to jump up and

mark things. He's a wonderful marker but a bit too keen. I've got leave to go over to Cholderton" (he named a village a few miles away) "and shoot a couple of cock pheasants over him. You'd better come along and bring a gun."

We met an aged keeper and prowled round the estate. For a long time we could find no game. At last I spotted a hare crouching in wet seed-clover, and scent was so bad that Smut, the ancient spaniel, pottered over it in its form, without either moving or detecting it, a thing you may sometimes see with beagles in a root field.

It was at least half an hour later that the keeper winged a cock pheasant which rose out of some turnips, dropped sixty or seventy yards away, and legged it down a slope out of sight. It was then I realised what a dog of championship standard was expected to do. Jasper was made to sit, trembling, for what seemed an unconscionable time. When at last allowed to go, he galloped to 'the fall' and raced down the line for two hundred yards, through a fence, and into another strip of roots. His master stood beside me, smoking a cigarette. The dog stopped and hunted this way and that, and once looked up for instructions. All he got, at very long range, was a wave of the hand of the *Continuez, mes enfants* variety. He cast himself up a grass hillside and down again. Then he quickly retraced part of the original line, as if to convince himself that he was not 'running heel.' No word was said. For all we knew, the pheasant was half a mile away by now. Then Jasper was off again, cast forward a little, stopped, and came racing back to us with the bird in his mouth.

I should have left well alone after that, but his owner thought that Jasper was still too excitable. So we tramped on, flushing hen pheasants out of the roots and banging away not at them, but five yards behind their tails. To those who have never done it, it is, believe me, astonishingly difficult to miss birds deliberately behind, when for years you have been endeavouring to shoot either at or in front of them. I hope the process soothed Jasper's nerves more than it did mine.

II.

On the first day of the Championship the rain began to fall solidly as we wound our way in a long line of cars up from the little inn in the valley to a farm in the beechwoods. The first two drives, over hurdles in a fold of the Plain, were not a success, for most of the birds, partridges and pheasants, broke out to a flank, rather than cross the valley, and the hares at Druid's Lodge, one of the strongholds of coursing, are as

sacred as peafowl are in India. The few birds shot in wet clover proved very hard to mark or recover.

As we adjourned to a large field of mangolds, I was addressed by a lady who said, "Would you like to carry Washy's cartridge-bag for him, instead of me? I've got to go now and it's a beast of a day. At any rate, you'll be able to see whatever's going on."

I was lucky in that chance employment. My new employer was a neighbour, a farmer, a humorist, a fine shot, and had been a famous gentleman rider, among many other things. I had on previous days' shooting met him and his own enormous Labrador 'Ben' (a dog also of very strong character and with a mordant sense of humour like his master's). "Ben's furious," he told me; "saw me put my gun in the car! Wasn't asked! No reason given! I hate apologising to dogs. Ben won't speak to me now for the next three days. Give me a couple of squibs, will you? I've missed almost everything so far this morning, and what I didn't miss none of these professional dogs could find!"

I will not enlarge on the fun he and I shared in the next two days. There were fields of mangolds and kale through which we squattered, wet to the waist, with hares rushing past us like drenched terriers, seeming to spirt water in every direction as they ran. There were moments when there seemed to be birds down in seven places and no one could be quite sure that everything was 'gathered.' There was an underkeeper whom my employer knew well and to him he confided, behind his hand, the whereabouts of birds which more than one champion dog had insisted was not there at all. ("All right, sir! I take my little bitch and have him in the evening!") There was an unorthodox drive where we lined a belt of trees on a boundary to intercept the partridges which always broke out on to the next estate. Here, when they arrived, everyone missed except my companion, who dropped a beauty like a turnip all among the judges and the waiting dogs which, in field-trial circles, 'did not count.'

And most of all I recall the immense line converging just before lunch in a half-moon of beaters, loaders, judges, handlers, stewards, and spectators on the beech trees that hide the Druid's Lodge paddocks. Here a very slow partridge came down the line at us amid shoutings. As my employer said to me later, "I started to put up the gun and there were only twenty-five people lined along the barrel like a Soviet execution!"

I recall that bird because when it had been dropped safely far behind the line on the gallops, two handlers, both of whom had marked its fall, asked permission to send their dogs for it. When four dogs had failed in turn, Jasper was brought from the far end of the line. The exact place where it fell

was indicated to him by a small juniper bush. He gave one quick sniff round the bush, decided that everyone so far had obviously been lying, flung himself in a galloping cast far down the wind, and picked up the bird, dead, sixty yards, at least, from where everyone was so sure it had fallen.

Each handler had his own methods, though all seemed able to control the dog at a range which no amateur would attempt. Some did it like traffic policemen with majestic sweeps of the arm. One Scotsman seemed to rely entirely on a word of command which sounded like "Git oot, g' bitchy!" One, not least of the experts, wore draped round his neck an orchestra of no less than four separate whistles, which, like traffic lights, indicated to the dog whether to 'stop,' 'go,' or turn right or left. Strange things were apt to happen when he inadvertently got them mixed or bunged up with raindrops. And finally, as if to prove that neither the dog nor his owner could overcome the supreme mystery of scent, we watched that morning six dogs sent out one by one on the dry down grass fringing the gallops for a dead partridge. None of them could wind it, and at last the judges themselves had to walk out and pick it up themselves.

A gamekeeper friend summed it up to me as we went off to lunch. "There's always trouble here. There's never no scent on this old grass. Last time we shot here his lordship had six or seven birds down in one place and our dogs couldn't own to one of 'em."

The final drive after lunch, over a curving hollow of the down, with dry rough grass on each side of it and scattered thorn-bushes, made me realise that on certain days all the training in the world might be in vain. The dogs in the stake had now been reduced to four or five. My employer, primed with luncheon, conversed humorously with myself, the next gun, a judge and two handlers, but he achieved a 'possible' at that drive, three partridges and a cock pheasant, and as they all fell dead where the dogs could mark the fall, they were quickly retrieved.

But farther up the line there was 'trouble,' exactly as my keeper-friend had anticipated. Everybody, judges and all, had seen two birds fall on the hillside behind the valley, and no dog, in that galaxy of internationals, could find them. It was not an easy place; for each dog had to begin by jumping a high fence of sheep-wire uphill before he started to cast himself in the grass and under the thorn-bushes. At last a golden bitch went out and stumbled on the dead pheasant. Jumping back, she fell heavily over the fence and lay on her side, bird in mouth, and I hope earned bonus-marks for determination. She certainly earned applause from the silent jury of onlookers.

But the partridge defeated four or five of the best retrievers in the country. So many people

had seen it fall and all were certain it was dead, just beyond a small thorn-bush. Dog after dog was sent out, while the assembly shivered in the frosty sunset on the opposite slope of the valley. And each dog dithered and pottered aimlessly along the down, while their handlers whistled and waved and flung their arms wildly, like band conductors whose instrumentalists have suddenly ceased to play.

I was standing in a group of handlers, surrounded by rather bored and crouching dogs which had been 'put out' of the stake earlier in the day. I heard one of the handlers murmur to another behind his hand. "I told you so," he said, "it's that yellow bitch of X.'s; she oughtn't to have been allowed out at all. Them dogs are all daft. It's *her* line they're hunting."

It took the best part of forty minutes to pick up after that drive, and at the end the senior judge had to walk up the hill and gather the dead bird himself.

And as my employer drove me home in the dusk, with hares limping across the track and the frost settling down on the Plain, I could not help thinking of Barry Pain's story of the Princess who was as Good as She was Beautiful. I expect you know that old tale of how the King, her Father, decided that any Prince who was fit to marry her would have to pass a very severe test of virtue, to travel in twenty minutes down the mile-long Street of Peril, which was full of all the Temptations his Professors of Iniquity could devise. And how all the Suitors telephoned, one by one, that they had been detained by a Fog in the City and none of them arrived in under three days.

Well, that cautionary tale seemed not inapt. The path of the budding Field-Trial Champion is beset with temptation on every side. There may be no scent or far too much. There are hares, lurking unexpectedly, to jump up under his nose and delude him in the moment of victory. There are fresh pheasants and partridges in the kale, unsprung, through which the trail of the wounded runner seems to wind. There are guns and loaders, who insist that the bird 'dropped like a stone,' just here or there, when it may have carried on for half a mile. There are scores of onlookers, smelling of tobacco and Harris tweed, nail-polish and beer and face-powder, all of whom saw the bird fall, some more inaccurately than others. There are guns who cannot shoot, and judges who cannot judge (I am only quoting what I was told by a disgruntled competitor), and handlers who cannot handle, but start interfering just as the dog himself is 'getting warm' and knows it. There are even birds which drop dead when everyone human believes them to be 'runners.' (And when the unfortunate dog brings those in, the judge is apt to suspect him at once of being 'hard in the

mouth' and of having 'pinched' the bird while retrieving it.)

There are, too, dogs which show initiative and believe their noses rather than their handler. And such dogs may seem to the onlooker to be 'as wild as a hawk.' And if, by contrast, a dog trusts his handler and goes exactly where he is sent, he may be thought to 'lack drive.'

But surely the dog's crowning sorrow, when he is in the last four or five 'left in' and is very near his goal, is to find, as in Barry Pain's fairy-tale, that the Golden Princess herself may have been One of the Temptations.

I think my friend and employer, as he drove me home that night, must have been meditating on similar lines, though he put it in a rather different way.

"Poor old Ben," he murmured absently, thinking of that great dog who would greet him with such reproach and hauteur when he got home, "I know dam' well he'd ha' found all those birds today and wiped the eye of these trades-union dogs! Work before relaxation with Ben, always! There ought to be *one* amateur dog at a field trial to follow behind these professionals and mop up! Old Ben simply wouldn't speak to me when I got home last night. I don't suppose he will tonight either!"

III.

It was a little later that I was, most unexpectedly, invited to shoot on the final day of a "Utility Gun-Dog" Trial in Sussex. "Utility gun-dogs," like utility chairs and kettles, accept a somewhat lower standard of merit than championship dogs. The trials are mostly held for working gamekeepers, and owners whose dogs get only so many days' shooting a year under ordinary conditions and cannot afford to go the round of the tournaments. The rules are, perhaps, relaxed a little in favour of common-sense and the dog. I accepted with delight, for my host and his shoot were deservedly famous; but with secret tremors, since two at least of the other 'guns' had shot often in first-class company. But it seemed better to agonise later over one's follies than never to take the opportunity of committing them.

On the December evening before the final, I unburdened my misgivings in the library to a son of the house. "I've never shot at a field trial before," I confessed; "what's the first thing to remember?"

The reply was unexpected. "The most important thing is to get the stuff *on* the ground," he said bluntly. "After all, to test twenty dogs, you ought to give them at least thirty brace of birds to pick up. Don't bother about a bird giving your neighbour a better chance if it comes over you. Down it! A bad gun can ruin any trial."

Later, in the same room, I

listened to my host going over the final details of the morrow with his head keeper. It was a revelation in thoroughness and *bundobust*. He had been planning this affair since the spring and had even planted two special fields of kale, with an eye to it. Beaters, stops, flankers, sewelling, and nets to flush the pheasants at the exact spot, even dead branches put up here and there in a vast sedge-bed round the lake, so that the fall of the ducks could be accurately marked, the parking of the cars, the arrangements for the handlers, down to a meticulously printed list of instructions to judges and competitors about what they could expect; it was as complete as anything I had ever seen. I marvelled.

The head keeper, a very intelligent man but like all keepers a pessimist, summed it up just before he said good-night. "All we want now," he said, "is the weather. I don't like the look of the glass."

He was right. We woke next morning to a soundless white world and it was still snowing hard. The one possibility, which could have confounded nine months' preparations, had become a fact. Everyone was very gloomy at breakfast.

"Well, that puts paid to the duck-drive off the lake," I was told, "and I doubt if the pheasants will ever find the kale. It's just a mass of snow. And on a morning like this half of them will never come down off the trees. And as for the handlers . . . some are coming from the far end of Kent and one from Cambridgeshire . . . !"

Very gradually the crowd assembled while it still snowed. The 'utility' dogs were of all sizes and colours—black labradors and yellow, golden retrievers, and even a cocker. They had, I knew, survived a series of local trials all over the country, and I knew, too, some of the odd chances which had enabled them to be there in the final. Some had been fortunate in the birds for which they had been sent. One good dog, I knew, had been disqualified because his owner had put out a hand to restrain him and he had mistaken it for the command to go: (motorists mistake traffic signals with just as disastrous results). Another, a keeper's dog, bored with inaction after hours in pouring rain, had gone in to retrieve without orders, eager for any chance to show what he could do. But there the lucky ones all were, in this strange snow-covered landscape, and it seemed probable that the game, which would be shot for them, would either be buried in the snow or lie out blatantly where a dog had only to use his eyes and not his nose.

I felt as much foreboding as some of their owners. The snow had kept off a big crowd, but there were quite enough people present to make any missing dismally conspicuous. Some of my companions had shot at the most famous shoots in the

country, from Six Mile Bottom to Wemmergill. I did not know whether to pray that nothing came to me at all, or for a quick succession of chances to 'get my eye in.' We lined out with our backs to a belt of woodland. Everything looked unreal in the snow. A hundred and fifty yards ahead, up the slope of a field, was an avenue of tall trees, hiding the specially planted kale. Any bird that emerged from it over the trees would be a highish bird with a lot of way on.

Luckily I had little time to think. There was a shout from the next gun as a hen pheasant planed down into the trees between us. I snapped at her hurriedly, and she dropped into the trees, lay for a moment in the snow, and disappeared into the brambles. "That's a runner, I'm afraid," I said to the nearest judge, forgetting entirely, first, that 'guns in a field trial should never utter a word,' and secondly, that a running bird is a better test of a dog than a dead one. She sent out the nearest dog at once; for utility gun-dogs accept the lower and more sensible standards of the shooting-field and do not always wait till the drive is over. The bird was dead when retrieved. I hoped sincerely the 'accused dog' would not be suspected of being 'hard in the mouth.'

But before I could worry, I was aware of a high fast cock pheasant coming at me over the trees of the avenue in front. He was crossing me on a slight diagonal and rising, the sort of bird which I can miss freely at any time, spectators or no spectators. At the last instant I realised that if I let him get any nearer he would be behind the top of a great oak tree which jutted out from the wood. He came down with a crash on the head of the senior judge, a lady, who was stooping at that moment to fondle the ears of a retriever.

My neighbour, the M.P., gave a great chuckling roar of laughter. "Oi!" he shouted. "You mustn't do that sort of thing! Not ON the judges, please! The book of the words says we're supposed to drop them in the wood behind."

I still maintain it was a real good bird to start any day with, even if by dog-trial standards it was 'dropped all wrong.'

But I will not go too deeply into the events of that cold and disastrous day; for disastrous it was to our host and all who had worked for it so carefully. Two-thirds of the pheasants had lost their way in this new white world of snow, and we could not find them any more than they could find the kale. It is, as so often, the petty incongruities that survive in memory: such as the two jays which came over the line, very high and very slow, and behind me a judge and a group of handlers wagering audibly on them. (For some reason their fall impressed this veteran gallery more than that of any pheasant.) There were pheasants that came at us through a blinding snowstorm, unable to see and getting

slower and slower till I think they were missed because they were almost standing still in the air. There was a water-test, where each dog had to forge his way across half-frozen sludge on an icy creek into snow-covered rhododendrons. And there was an afternoon drive, where teal swirled about over the lake behind us, and in front out of the wood came two foxes, which looked at the massed line of guns and dogs and spectators, and, distrusting our vulpicidal tendencies, threw themselves with unerring instinct on the mercy of the local Master of Foxhounds. (And if you have never seen it, there is no more vivid spectacle than a December fox in fullest pelage, at about ten yards range, crossing snow which is sparkling in the sun.)

But most clearly I recall a very excellent lunch in a cottage-parlour where my neighbour, another of the judges, told me tales of the kennel of gun-dogs he had managed for an Indian Maharajah. . . . "A very nice fellow, but he expected you to drink with him till dawn and every now and then he'd get tough and order out the old brandy and decide to see all his guests under the table. I was usually the last to go. . . .

"And when he held a field trial, what did he do but ask a young Army officer up to judge it!

"'What the hell am I to do?' the young chap asks me before it started. 'I don't know anything about judging field trials.'

"'Do?' I said; 'why, you put the Maharajah first, and the Raj Kumar second, and you can give the third prize to anyone you like, and the Maharajah'll be so pleased he'll probably present you with a Purdey gun and ask you up here for a month to shoot a tiger!'"

And that made me realise for the hundredth time how sad it is that the aces of field sports, who have seen so much more than the rest of us, so rarely bring themselves to write it down. They leave it to the duffers. I broached this once to one who in his day had been the most-talked-of Master of Foxhounds in England. He had been, after luncheon, in his most expansive mood, telling me how he had worked up a moribund hunt in a partridge-shooting county, playing off A. delicately against B., and B. against C. or D., until at last the whole countryside, squires, farmers, keepers, poachers, horse-dealers, and even the illicit game-dealers, were all assisting, one way and another, to promote foxhunting.

"But why don't you write your autobiography?" I asked.

"I did once," he admitted. "But it seemed such bilge when I'd written it down; *so I tore up all three pages!*"

PRELUDE TO FLIGHT.

BY J. A. K.

In olden times, when anyone had the urge to fly somewhere, it was all quite easy. All, for instance, Dædalus had to do was to amass a large enough quantity of feathers, glue, wax and the like, mould them into wings—and away he went. The Wright Brothers were the same; a few balls of string, some tacks, some pieces of wood and canvas—and away they went. Count Zeppelin probably took a little longer, on account of the greater bulk of his chosen medium. But the preparatory arrangements of all pioneers pale into insignificance compared with what has to be done nowadays, now that civilisation has progressed. And, I would like to make it clear, I do not refer to our aircraft designers and inventors; I refer to the ordinary, common-or-garden man-in-the-plane, the passenger.

All the wheels and intricate machinery of getting a passenger into the air start—as far as that passenger is concerned—with the instructions "You will fly to Somewhere on such and such a date." (*En passant*, I have intentionally chosen the words above. In these days of high fares, the number of people who travel long distances by air at their own volition and expense is comparatively negligible. I am quite sure that a questionnaire would establish that ninety per cent of all long-distance air travellers have their fares paid for them by someone else, by their Government, firm, or private employer.)

With the instructions to fly, the first action has to be taken by the potential traveller. This resolves itself into sitting down with the head in the hands and making a list of all the formalities which have to be completed; turning up this, that and the other, making a note of a date here and a place there, and bit by bit assembling a mass of literature. When all this has been done, then one has to break it all up into its component parts and deal with each one separately.

But to descend from the airy sphere of generalisations to the more earthbound one of particularities, let me describe the arrangements which I had to make and the things which had to be done before I left East Africa, a few weeks ago, *en route* for a foreign country.

Having been notified that my flight was to take place, and having collected my thoughts together as described above, the first thing I did was to fill in a large piece of paper (in, of course, quadruplicate) which contained a wide diversity of questions. I had naturally to state what my name was (in full and in block capitals), and where I

wished to go to and when. I furthermore had to say why I wanted to go anyway, and if I was not allowed to go this time, when was the next best time, and so forth.

Then there came a paragraph or so which demanded from me details and dates of when I was last vaccinated and inoculated against some half-dozen diseases. This is a very important heading indeed, and acts as a curtain-raiser, as it were, for the deadly serious business, which can be summed up in the two words 'International Certificates.' These are all-important bits of paper, and if you do not have them, it avails you precisely nothing that Mr Eden or Mr Morrison, or one of their successors or predecessors, should in the best of copper-plate writing "request and require in the name of His Majesty all those whom it may concern to allow the bearer to pass freely without let or hindrance and to afford him every assistance. . . ." Far from affording every assistance, if you lack your International Certificates for Yellow Fever and Smallpox you will find yourself (if you ever manage to get on the plane, that is) clapped without any ado at all into an isolation hospital immediately upon arrival at your destination. And they do tell me that isolation and quarantine hospitals in some Eastern countries are not what you might call beds of roses.

These International Certificates first swept into prominence somewhere towards the end of the last war, to the best of my belief. It has taken from then until now for them to become regularised. For the first few years things were very complicated; for different parts of the world had different ideas what these Certificates should look like or be. For instance, when leaving Germany for Africa a few years ago my whole family and I were duly and correctly inoculated and vaccinated, and I was given the forms for safe keeping. On arrival in London, for onward transmission, I tendered these forms to the correct authorities, only to be told that they were now the wrong sort, having been superseded by something quite different. So we had to start all over again, and, in my case, I was re-vaccinated a few inches below the festering sore on my arm which was the result of my last vaccination a few days earlier. Apparently a doctor is almost immediately struck off the rolls if he signs an International Certificate when he has not himself actually performed the operation.

But I feel that I have talked enough about International Certificates; for there are many more columns and paragraphs in the Air Passage Application Form of which they are only an incidental. For instance, there are the paragraphs of foreboding, in which you insert your religion and your next of kin. These always strike me as being ominous, and I have a superstitious dislike of completing them. However, it is,

I suppose, a comforting thought to know that in the event of the worst happening one's scattered relics would not be gathered together and placed on a burning ghat or in a Tower of Silence.

There are also the usual paragraphs and spaces which request addresses and telephone numbers, and a whole bevy of rather obscure ones which have to be filled in by other people. In all, I suppose, there are some thirty questions to be answered—so it will be seen that the Airways do not lag behind other Government Departments and institutions in their inquisitiveness. For newcomers to the business, indeed, they acquit themselves very well. They have one excellent form which they usually distribute during flight to those passengers about to get out at the next stop. This one starts off "Name," "Passenger from . . . to . . .," and then proceeds to ask the apparently highly intimate question "State where you have spent the last fourteen nights." This is often resented by passengers, but they really have no need to worry. It is only another Medical Form, and the object behind it is to enable the fabulous 'them' to check back on the origins of any disease which may subsequently manifest itself. And even if it were not, one does not fill it in on oath.

Formalities, of course, were not complete without some extensive dealings with my passport. For some reason, the very production of this document seems to raise suspicion in the minds of officials. It is invariably studied as if the basis of the examination was that it must be a forgery and cannot be accepted as genuine until there is not the shadow of a doubt left that it is really so. In a dingy office, official fingers turned my somewhat tattered and battered booklet upside down and round about and flipped the pages over rather disdainfully; official eyes scrutinised the entries and previous visas; official mien grew severe on observing the photograph (for which I could not blame it, since the photograph had been taken in an obscure little den in the purlieus of Addis Abeba and was even worse than most of its kind); but finally, official suspicion was lulled, a stamping-pad was produced, and in exchange for a small sum the necessary visa was entered on a blank page. And that was that; the functionary and I parted the best of friends, and as I left the premises I reminded myself that I had no reason to be aggrieved at the suspicion under which I had so obviously lain. I had, after all, been dealing with a representative of a race which deems all men to be guilty until they have been proved to be innocent.

The next thing to be done was to get some money to spend in the country which I now had the official right to enter. This, in these days of planning, rigid economies, and strange terms like hard and soft

currencies, is not what it used to be. You can no longer go to a bank and ask for a couple of thousand pengoes or whatever it may be. You have to deal almost exclusively in those most useful articles, travellers' cheques — and even these are restricted, of course, to a ridiculously inadequate amount.

Since I was not to know what new rules and regulations had been introduced since I last acquired a booklet of cheques from my bank, I armed myself with my passport, my nice new visas, my International Certificates (for who knows what officials may demand to see these days), my birth certificate, my identity card, my wedding lines, and my authority to deal with NAAFI, and approached the representative of my Bank Manager. As only that morning I had received from that gentleman an envelope marked 'Confidential,' which on being opened revealed a letter commencing "Dear Sir,—We regret to have to inform you that, at the close of business on . . .," I was slightly apprehensive about the outcome of my interview. My demand was modest in the extreme; a mere £50 in travellers' cheques — but still, Bank Managers are Bank Managers, and they have their Reserves to consider, I suppose.

However, my method of approach was successful, and the forms were produced for my completion. Compared with some, they were simple and appeared to confine themselves to essentials. They also produced the goods with comparative rapidity; for in six hours I was in possession of my booklet of cheques. The value of these was then entered in my passport (a visa-page having been misappropriated for this purpose), and the transaction was completed. I was another stage nearer to my goal of becoming airborne.

Most of the formalities were now over. What still remained to be done were largely private matters; matters which I chose to do rather than had to do. But I still had to get my ticket.

This business, for some reason best known to themselves, the various Air Lines have entirely failed to simplify. Travelling by rail, all you have to do is to put your one and sixpence ha'penny down on the window-sill and get your little paste-board ticket in exchange; travelling by road, you get it from the conductor; even travelling by sea is fairly simple and you only get a small piece of paper. But travelling by air . . . Before anything at all can happen you must (believe it or not) produce your International Certificates. Relevant extracts are taken and entered on to a manifesto. Then the booking clerk has a look at your passport and checks once again that everything is really and truly in order. This done, he is in a position to accept your money (or your Governmental Letter of Authority to Travel by Air, or whatever form is relevant to the Department concerned). And then at

last the serious business of actually issuing the ticket begins. First of all, it has to be prepared. This involves much writing; for the ticket contains a great deal of the information which has already been gathered elsewhere, and all this has to be written down. As the ticket itself is in the form of a little booklet with several pages, much use is made of carbon paper in the process—and the last page or so is almost invariably illegible. However, you finally leave the Airways office with the little booklet complete; and by this time you are in possession of almost enough paper, forms, and documents to start a Government Department all on your own.

Having satisfactorily brought to a conclusion all the formalities already recorded, I then decided that the time had come to give my attention to the business of packing. This, to be paradoxical, in the first instance resolves itself into deciding what not to pack, and involves much mental activity. All sorts of things have to be taken into consideration: the nature of the country and the climate you are going to, the forms of activity in which you are going to indulge when you get there (do you want a dinner jacket as well as tennis kit?), how long your stay is to be, and so on and so forth. Speaking from personal experience, the way I set about it is first of all to make a mental list of all the relevant considerations. Then I take out from the wardrobe and other storage spaces everything that I will obviously need. This is all piled on to a bed and the floor and anywhere else that is readily available, and I look at it. I then shake the head dubiously, pack it all into air-travel cases, grips, bags and the like, and weigh the whole lot. The answer is invariably about a couple of hundredweight, and the process of whittling down begins. A suit is taken out here, a pair of shoes there, a shirt somewhere else, until only the bare minimum demanded by the dictates of decency remains. This is again weighed, and is found to be some twenty pounds underweight. I now start the process of de-whittling or adding on. Back goes a shirt and back goes a coat. I end up this stage by being fifteen pounds overweight.

But it would be both tedious and repetitive to describe the ebb and flow which takes place until the exactly correct weight is finally achieved. Gunners call it bracketing—and it always takes much longer than you think. However, at last one has baggage that weighs the correct amount, and one zips up the bags and ties on labels with pride and a sense of smug satisfaction. It is then, and not until then, that one realises that all one's toilet articles have been left out and that one's sole pair of permissible pyjamas are still under the pillow on the bed.

Running more or less concurrently with the process of

packing, I carried out the necessary shopping. Foremost among this was the purchase of a packet of those most invaluable little pills which are now on the market, and which are guaranteed to soothe the worst sailor in the world (as I unfortunately happen to be). And while I am engaged in giving this unsolicited testimonial, I may also say that the same pills are held in very high esteem by the cognoscenti as a sovereign cure for a hang-over.

As it turned out on this particular trip, it was just as well that I remembered to buy them, because the journey was, for part of the way, rather more than bumpy and the paper bags so thoughtfully provided by the management would most certainly have been inadequate. And quite apart from that, on one stage of the journey I had as a next-door neighbour a neurotic Chinawoman. She entered the plane apprehensively, determined that the worst was going to happen. She began to be sick as the pilot tested out his engines before taking-off, became worse as he taxied along the tarmac, and reached a crescendo as we flew a smooth and utterly undisturbed course over the sea. Fortunately for her—and for me—her journey lasted a bare half-hour.

But to return to my pre-flight shopping; a book was another necessity which had to be bought; for one cannot sleep for the entire journey when it lasts a whole day. A more boring form of travel than flying has not yet been devised and presumably never will be. The faster one moves, the less interesting is the journey. Walking you see everything, on a horse you see most things, in a car you see less, and so on until in an aeroplane you see nothing. And just to make dead sure that you will not, designers of aircraft always seem to prefer to put the wings beneath the level of the windows. All it is then physically possible to see is an expanse of silver-coloured metal and the engines; the former usually seems to have big stains on it where oil is obviously and disconcertingly leaking out of some — to the layman—undoubtedly vital part, while the latter (especially at night) belch out the most frightening flames, licking round the fabric of the wings, inside which, one understands, are the tanks containing several thousand gallons of highly inflammable petrol. On the whole, then, and taking everything into consideration, it is wiser to read a book than to gaze out of the window.

I also had other items to purchase, small things such as labels and one which is indispensable to all travellers by air. I refer to a portable alarm-clock; for it is an absolute *sine qua non* of air travel that journeys inevitably start at the most unreasonable and improbable hours. On this particular occasion my ticket (that mine of information) told me that I had to present myself at the airport at 0430 hours on the

following morning. I was staying a distance of forty minutes away from it; I must allow thirty minutes to get up and fifteen minutes to wake up; then another twenty minutes ought to be added in case of emergencies (a puncture on the way to the airport, a failure of the car to arrive on time, and so on), and finally, a quarter of an hour must be allowed because of the chronic inability of African servants to understand the necessity for punctuality. That brought reveillé back to half-past two—and the servant might well fail to call me altogether. Oh, yes; an alarm-clock is very necessary.

Having, as I thought, finished all my shopping on the afternoon before the take-off, and being a model for any man-about-to-take-the-air, I was relaxing over a cup of tea at the Club when I was informed that I was wanted on the 'phone. From past experience I feared the worst—and it happened. It was my own fault entirely; I ought to have known better than to put myself at the end of a telephone-line. A voice at the other end said, "Is that . . . ? It is understood that you are proceeding to X. on tomorrow's plane. You will be responsible for carrying the Diplomatic Bag . . .," and so on, giving instructions for collecting it—which had to be within the next ten minutes, if not earlier.

I sadly left my tea unfinished and went to collect my incubus (which, my dictionary informs me, is "anything that oppresses like a nightmare" and is therefore entirely the appropriate name for that accursed bag). One used to read (and still may do, for all that I know) of the glamorous and exciting life led by King's Messengers; of how they dash about the world with their despatches, travelling by Golden Arrows and Orient Expresses and almost continuously repelling the advances of beautiful spies. My own experience—and it has been quite large—of carrying Diplomatic Bags has been utterly different.

It always starts in the same way. Some dreary little person rings you up or accosts you in an office and details you to carry the bag (or bags) to your destination. You are then handed a sheet of paper with your instructions on it and are told of the awful penalties which you will suffer if the bag should chance to go astray. To make sure that that is as near impossible as makes no difference, you are, in fact, instructed that at no time during the journey may the bag be out of your sight and, if possible, not out of your hand. This, it may readily be understood, is a handicap of the first order. Wherever you go on the journey you have to take the bag with you; you take it to meals, to bed, and to bath; you sleep with it under your pillow, and if you have the misfortune to make a forced landing in a foreign country, you are expected to eat it, lock, stock and barrel, only spitting out

the envelopes, red tape, and sealing-wax. Or so one has always understood. It is, in fact, what the R.A.F. call a 'bind' of the first magnitude to be caught for the duty of carrying the Diplomatic Bag—and again in my experience has never resulted in any of the compensations which King's Messengers are commonly held to enjoy. I have never, to the best of my belief, yet set eyes on a beautiful spy, and I have certainly never had to repel the advances of one—(with one hand only; the other, of course, is clutching the incubus). The nearest I have ever got to it was on this particular journey when I was sweetly kissed by the Air hostess. But that is a different story altogether and had nothing to do with the Diplomatic Bag—which I was sitting on, just in case. Maybe my ill-luck is because I look more like a commercial traveller than a King's Messenger.

My collection of the bag on this occasion ran entirely true to form. I signed a receipt for it, I signed a paper (in at least triplicate) to show that I understood my instructions, I tucked the bag under my arm—and went back to the Club. It was now too late to finish my tea; I could not have a drink in the bar and I did not fancy eating dinner chained to my bag—so I retired to my room, ordered drinks to be sent up, and went to bed hungry, meditating on the folly of allowing myself to be caught like a novice.

In view of the earliness of the start, it was, indeed, scarcely worth while going to bed at all—and I know that many people advocate a late party instead of an early bed. But the possession of the incubus resulted in my having no option on this particular occasion—and I was in bed by nine o'clock. Almost before I was asleep (or so it seemed) I was awoken by a knocking at the door. It was one of the occasions, apparently, when the African boy had chosen to err on the side of keenness. It still lacked three-quarters of an hour before the time for which I had set my alarm-clock to ring. But I had no option again. It would have been impossible to drop off to sleep once more, having been so thoroughly well awakened, and the only thing to do was to get dressed. The question was, in what. At this deplorable time of day, when the human vitality is at its lowest ebb and when, in my humble opinion, every prospect is vile, it can be bitterly cold in the Highlands of East Africa. On the other hand, I knew full well that during the day to come we were due to spend some while in places that would inevitably be sweltering hot. The question was, to shiver now or to swelter later. A toss of the coin decided the matter: shiver now. So I dressed myself in bush shirt and shorts, from the various openings of which soon protruded blue and goose-fleshed arms and legs.

I packed my bags and went to look for my car. To my con-

siderable surprise, it was waiting and ready for me. The driver told me that he had been there for at least an hour. Since I was now twenty minutes ahead of my schedule, it was obvious that the old military custom had been at work. The General orders the parade for nine o'clock, and the Colonel therefore orders his for eight. As it would be an unheard-of thing for a Colonel to come on parade and stand a chance of finding fault with it, the Adjutant decides that he must hold one at 7.15, to give him time to have a good look round first, and so it goes on throughout the military hierarchy. In this connection, when in my younger days I took part in a parade of the whole of the Aldershot Command which was to march past His Majesty King George V. in honour of his Jubilee, it is my recollection (admittedly somewhat dimmed by time) that as a Second Lieutenant I spent some forty-eight consecutive hours on parade.

But as I was saying . . . my car was waiting, and off we went through the deserted streets to the airport. On reaching it, the truth of the old saying was brought home to me. Travelling thither hopefully, it seemed possible, even probable, that comfort and perhaps welcome might await one; arrival proved that, in the words of a newer saying, nobody could care less about one.

The airport seemed to be utterly deserted. I bade my driver carry my baggage out of the car and place it on a counter which gave the appearance of having been designed for that purpose. As it was obviously safe there, for there was not a soul about, I went off to investigate my surroundings. Not that they were new to me; I just wondered if any alterations had yet been made to the temporary buildings which had been erected as an airport during the early days of the war.

In one of the obscurer corners of the building I succeeded in finding signs of life. A room was lit up, a room furnished with small tables and obviously designed to be a refreshment room. But it was at first sight empty and uninhabited. Further search revealed an attendant stretched out and fast asleep behind a counter. He was flushed into activity and instructed to procure me a cup of black coffee. He returned with a pot of tea, but added for good measure a plate of bacon and eggs. He further informed me that there was nothing to pay and that it was all on the house. I started to make a feeble joke about the condemned man's breakfast, but decided that it was both ill-timed and ill-omened, and changed it into a cough instead.

Incidentally, since the man had no idea who I was or even whether I was travelling by plane, I pass on the information for what it is worth to anyone who is at any time feeling too hard up to pay for a square meal. For all I know,

this free meal business may apply to lunch and dinner as well as to breakfast. It may be possible to stroll into the refreshment room at 8 P.M., announce that you are about to travel to Iceland or Greenland or Zululand, and demand to be provided with an aperitif, a glass of wine, and a four-course dinner. I do not know; but one day I will try.

My breakfast finished (if a meal at such an unholy hour can be called breakfast), I returned to where I had left my baggage. The room was still deserted—and according to the information given on my ticket, the hour of departure was not so very far off. I began to wonder if I had come to the right airport on the wrong day or the wrong airport on the right day. I set out to investigate; but my doubts were soon put to rest by the arrival of another passenger. This man, of obscure mid-European origin, confirmed that I was indeed at the right place at more or less the right time, but asked if I had not been told that the aeroplane had been delayed overnight and was not due in until seven o'clock. He said that he had been rung up about dinner-time and told that he need not be at the airport until 6.30. I reflected that the uses of the telephone are varied. All it had done for me was to burden me with the Diplomatic Bag. For my companion it had ensured an extra two hours or so of sleep. Why, I wondered, had the office not rung me as well.

Other passengers were now beginning to arrive. A lone woman with two small children; a man and wife and four children (I wonder who was paying their fares), one or two nondescript men and women, my central European friend—but no signs of a beautiful spy. I decided to have another breakfast on the Company, and joined a table where two of the nondescript men were sitting.

They were engaged in what I have found to be the almost inevitable conversation of those about to fly; telling, with deprecatory smiles and half-hearted laughs, masochistic stories of previous accidents in the air in which they had been involved, narrow escapes, reports in the newspapers (Constellation crashes with loss of fifty lives, Skymaster now missing for six days, and so on), and absolutely revelling in them. I joined in the party with my own favourite story, which, I am proud to say, went down big. It goes like this; and is, I may say, quite true.

A friend of mine was due to fly from somewhere in Mid-East to East Africa in a Dakota belonging to the R.A.F. He was told to report to the aerodrome at such and such a time on Monday—and did so. After four or five hours of hanging about, playing lying dice and the like, he was told that he might as well go away because one of the engines was misbehaving and they would not be taking off today after all. He had better come back

tomorrow, Tuesday, at the same time, when all the necessary repairs should be finished.

He returned at the correct time on Tuesday, and again hung about for four or five hours, "making a bit of a habit of it," as he said. He was then told that he had better go away again, for they would not be taking off today either. The pilot had gone on leave, it was explained, and a relief was not readily available. (This all happened, I must interpolate, just after the end of the war when the release programme was making things difficult all round.) He should therefore return again tomorrow, Wednesday, when, it was hoped, aeroplane, pilot, crew, and all would be ready to take the air together.

Once again he returned at the correct time, and this time there were no hitches. The Dakota took to the air at the advertised time, and everything went as merrily as a bell. But not for as long as it might have done. Several hours later, while flying over one of the more inhospitable portions of the earth's surface, where the River Nile flows through tens of thousands of square miles of swamp, my friend glanced out of the window and saw that the port engine was very much on fire. Great flames were pouring out of it and the fabric was becoming seared. Since no one else in the plane seemed to have observed this phenomenon, my friend reckoned that it was up to him to do something. He accordingly went along to the cabin and touched the pilot on the shoulder, saying, "Have you seen that?" The pilot took a quick look at the ghastly sight, and exclaiming, "We've got just about a couple of minutes before the whole thing explodes," put his plane into a steep power-dive, which he held on to until he hit Mother Nile. This effectively extinguished the flames, but now there were other problems to consider.

The Nile by any standards is a large river, and here, as has been said, it flowed through thousands of square miles of swamp in what is, to all intents and purposes, almost a huge inland sea (but luckily, a sea with a certain amount of dry land about it where high patches of ground stand up above the surrounding marshes and open lakes). It is also, my friend remembered almost at once, infested by crocodiles. The general opinion of passengers and crew was, as they say in the thriller-films, "We gotta get out of here, quick." Fortunately, the Dakota was carrying two inflatable dinghies. The emergency exit in the fusilage was ripped open and the first dinghy was cast out on to the river, where it sank like a stone. This was not so encouraging, for the plane itself was giving every sign of doing likewise. The second dinghy was launched, and to the general relief and in answer to the general prayer, remained afloat. Seldom, said my friend, had he seen a plane so quickly emptied, and although it was rather like putting a

quart into a pint pot the dinghy responded magnificently. It was accommodating almost twice as many persons as it had been designed to take, but still showed an inch or so of freeboard.

Those men who had equipped themselves with the paddles began to get busy; for the plane was beginning to settle in the water and gave the appearance of having only a few minutes left before taking the final plunge. Had it done so prematurely, the position of the dinghy, tucked away right underneath it, would have been unenviable. They plied their paddles with vigour—but the dinghy, possibly because of its overload, did not move an inch. They plied them with even more vigour, but with the same lack of results. The plane began to sink visibly—and it was only then that someone noticed that the dinghy was still tethered fast to its parent by the painter. This called for rapid action, but the moment produced the man—and furthermore, the man produced the right tools. An axe came to hand like a rabbit out of a conjurer's hat, one stroke of it cut the rope, the paddlers paddled with frenzy, the dinghy shot into mid-stream like a cherry-pip, and the Dakota dived head-first to the bottom of the Nile.

That, apart from some rather pedestrian details of a sixty-mile walk to the nearest village, escapades with elephants and other such wild-life *en route*, hunger (but not thirst; there was too much water altogether), sunburn and fatigue, finishes my friend's story. Told properly, it is a good one under any circumstances, but, as I have said, I find that it always goes down exceptionally well with casual company waiting to embark at an airport. Members of the audience usually laugh "Ha-ha" politely, and look unconcerned to the best of their ability. The conversation then almost invariably turns to the subject of the improved methods of fire-proofing in modern planes and studiously nonchalant questions are put, one to the other, of how many engines a four- or two-engined plane can keep up on in an emergency, particular reference being made, of course, to the type of aircraft in which the immediate journey is to be undertaken.

By the time we had finished exchanging stories and I had finished my second breakfast, what Homer was pleased to call rosy-fingered dawn was breaking. In passing, I always consider that to think up an adjective like that to describe such a drab time of day as dawn is a true measure of Homer's genius. Commonplace people like myself may think of it as many things, but few are complimentary.

What interested me was that things really looked as if they might soon be going to happen. One or two members of the staff were taking their places behind tables, looking smug and well-slept, and two drivers outside were revving up the

engines of the ambulance and fire-engine.

I returned to my baggage, which was still where I had left it. Beside it, another Central European was having a heated argument with a nice girl belonging to the airport, who was telling him that he was not allowed to fly without his International Certificates. He seemed quite unable to grasp this elementary fact, and I gathered that he considered it to be enough to show the authorities the vaccination scars on his left arm. But the girl was firm—and he was finally led away, gesticulating angrily, by the friends who had come to see him off.

By this time there was an official waiting to deal with me and the last-minute formalities which concerned me. An entirely new form was thrust at me, and upon it I had to state—as near as could be, on oath—how much currency I was taking out of the country and what sort. I did not rightly know what lay behind this question, so reckoned that absolute truth was the best answer. The man looked surprised to see me turning out my pockets and my wallet, and even entering on the sheet a lucky threepenny-bit. But for all the checking up which was done, I could with the greatest ease have concealed a suitcaseful of pieces of eight.

Then came the ceremony of weighing-in. I pushed along my two air-travel bags to be placed on the weighing-machine at the end of the counter, where they were taken charge of by a drowsy- and frowsy-looking Indian. In the meanwhile I stepped on to another machine carrying under my arm everything but the kitchen-stove and the Diplomatic Bag (which was allowed to travel unweighed). It is a nice little idiosyncrasy of some airlines that, although baggage is very strictly restricted and vast sums are mulcted from the passenger who unhappily takes one ounce over and above his entitlement, the passenger himself and what he can carry upon his person are not taken into account. Thus the thing to do is to keep your baggage down to the statutory minimum, to wear a couple of overcoats and your thickest suiting, sling on your back an Alpine rucksack (which seems to be able to take almost a hundredweight at a pinch), and carry a kit-bag under one arm and a suitcase under the other.

While I was weighing myself after this fashion, I observed a certain amount of excitement being generated at the far end of the counter. The drowsy Indian was now a very alert Indian, and the animated centre of a group of airport officials, white, brown, and black. I could not see what they were all looking at, but it appeared to be something on the counter alongside the weighing-machine. In fact, it almost looked as if it was my travel-bag which was causing this unseemly early-morning furore. I became certain of this when the Indian pointed at me—and all eyes

turned towards me. What, I thought to myself, what have they found? I rapidly turned over in my mind what I could remember of the contents of the case. No firearms; no explosives; no hashish; no Communist literature; no picture post-cards; everything seemed to be all right. But you never can tell in these days of regulations and decrees. Perhaps I was committing a deadly crime by taking out of the country more than two shirts or three pairs of socks. Who should know? So putting on my best Customs-house face, I approached the group of men.

The leader of the group—whom I suspect from his badges of rank to have been at least an Air Commodore—said, "What have you got in here?" I resented his curt tone (and at such an early hour, too) and said, "What do you think? A bomb?" This seemed to impress them, and I noticed one or two rather unostentatiously slinking away. The Air Commodore said, "This needs to be looked into." I said, as politely as I felt able, "Come, come. What is all this about?" The Air Commodore, without answering, put his head down to the bag and applied his ear to it. Then I realised that the whole root and cause of the trouble was my alarm-clock, which I had slipped in on top of everything when I got up in the morning, and which was now ticking away sonorously among my shirts. Maybe, like me, the Commodore was not at his best at this rosy-fingered hour of day; for he did not seem to be at all amused when I explained to him the error of his thoughts. But in spite of his obvious lack of humour and general bonhomie, he was probably quite a decent fellow, a good husband and kind to animals, so I allowed the matter to slide with as merry a laugh as I could raise at this extremely humourless hour. I re-zipped my bag over the offending clock, smiled pleasantly to the groups of officials, and settled down once again to wait. It really looked as if this interminable vigil was soon to come to an end. The plane had just arrived, and the incoming passengers were filing into the building. Some were leaving the plane altogether here; others were only coming ashore, so to speak, for a meal while the plane refuelled.

I looked at the plane with interest. It seemed to be solid enough, and I was gratified to see that it had four engines. I am a firm believer in the old adage of "the more the merrier" in relation to such things—especially when one's journey is to take one over a thousand miles or more of ocean. The crew, too, looked good decent types; strong characters and married men, I should not wonder. Certainly not the sort of men to take foolish risks.

So I mused until, wonder of wonders, it was really and truly time to embark. Grasping my various impedimenta under my arms—and wishing that I had as many of them as

an octopus or as that ungainly Hindu deity whose name escapes me—I scaled the ladder which entered the door of the aeroplane far above the ground. At the entrance the crew of the plane was lined up as a sort of reception committee, giving smiles of recognition to old passengers and smiles of greeting — or perhaps encouragement—to new ones like myself. A steward showed me to my seat, and tried to take away from me the Diplomatic Bag. I politely but firmly sat upon it, which deterred him effectively. (I do not believe that I have yet mentioned that this was a foreign airline, and the steward and I consequently had no mutual language.)

At last all the passengers were in and the doors of the plane were closed. At last, one thought, at last! . . . But it was not so. Another rite had to be performed to the all-powerful, almighty, and supreme god of air travel, Prophylaxis. A man walked slowly up and down the length of the plane between the seats spraying us and our belongings with some form of toxic gas designed to asphyxiate and thereby kill any noxious form of insect life endemic to East Africa; particularly members of the mosquito family. There is a widespread belief among airport officials and health officials the world over that East Africa is coated with a seething mass of dangerous carriers of the more unpleasant and lethal diseases, all of them jostling and shoving each other in an endeavour to get into passing aeroplanes, where they will snatch a free passage to fresh woods and pastures new. Having reached these woods and pastures, they will then set about propagating their own particular form of disease, be it yellow fever, elephantiasis or sleeping sickness, among the hitherto unsullied population. Travelling once by air during the war from East Africa to Ceylon, I touched down in Egypt, Iraq, Bahrein and India, among other places. I got on famously with my transit formalities everywhere until it came to light that my place of origin had been Nairobi, Kenya. Then the health official, or whoever it may have been, drew away from me as if I had been a particularly unclean leper, and beckoned me to betake myself into a sort of isolation ward. There, when everyone else had been cleared, I was cross-questioned. My documents were examined minutely, and only when it was established without the slightest possible shadow of doubt that I could not be the carrier of anything more deadly than the common cold was I allowed to go free; and even then, one felt that it was against the better judgment of all concerned.

As a matter of fact, Kenya is probably one of the healthiest places, generally speaking, in the whole of Africa—and the chief thing which the man with the Aerosol bomb does is to impregnate one's clothes, damage

one's eyes, and ruin one's sandwiches.

At the conclusion of his promenade up and down the plane, he gives one or two playful squirts into the air, at random like a *feu-de-joie*, the doors are opened, and he descends the ladder, which is then removed. The doors are again closed, finally this time, and being obedient citizens we follow the instructions which flash at us in red from a panel at the end of the cabin. That is to say, we fix our safety-belts and make a mental note that it is *défense de fumer*. There is a buzzing and a whistling like the tuning-up of a radio, and the air hostess—a bilingual little girl, it seems—comes on the air. She tells us, first in French and then in English, that she and the other members of the crew welcome us to aircraft ABC 12345. She hopes that we shall have a very enjoyable voyage—and will we please remember that in front of us are paper bags and life-jackets, both for use in emergency. On this note of gloom, the radio switches off and the pilot switches on. The engines roar, the plane shudders, and we move, slowly at first, across the tarmac. The moment has at last come—the moment to which all the hours of waiting in offices, of filling in forms, of visiting functionaries, of preparation generally, have been directed. With a crescendo of engine-roar we take to the air. The flight has begun.

TEA.

BY F. KINGDON-WARD.

WHAT is England's national drink—in the sense that Coca-cola might be called the national drink of the U.S.A., and vodka the national drink of the U.S.S.R.? The cynic might reply (grimly enough), "water"; yet even now, when times are getting harder and currency softer every day, the national drink bill amounts to quite a tidy sum—over seven hundred million last year! So we cannot dismiss beer from its throne without at least a hearing.

However, there is good reason to believe that of late years tea has begun to challenge beer as our national drink. No politician has yet had the hardihood to suggest that beer be subsidised: you still pay for your half-pint o' bitter at the public-house; but your "cup o' char" comes mainly out of the public purse.

All this is merely to introduce with an even flow the subject of Tea (with a capital).

Having been connected for some years with the great Indian Tea industry, I recall a number of incidents—comic, not so comic or uncomic—which occurred from time to time and may be worth recording. For Tea, both in pre-Indian days and since, has had a respectable and even spectacular history. There was, for instance, the incident of the leopard of Qwong. (If that sounds too much like an introduction from Dr Watson's notes it cannot be helped; there is no connection.)

It so happened that while I was Assistant Manager of Qwong Tea Estate in Upper Assam, a leopard appeared one day in the Tea. Nothing very unusual in that, you will say; but you must admit it demanded action. The leopard was first seen in the block farthest from the factory, which, owing to labour shortage that season, had been temporarily abandoned, and was consequently somewhat overgrown. There was plenty of cover there, including deep drainage trenches, and beyond lay open country consisting of swamps, patches of jungle, and scattered paddy-fields. It seemed probable that the leopard was lying up in the Tea by day in order to raid the cultivated land for cattle at dusk, and since it was the plucking season, it would obviously be unwise to leave it there.

On his daily round the Manager carried a loaded rifle. Scouts, perched in selected shade trees, kept a look-out during plucking, and the workers were warned to report the leopard immediately it was seen.

A week passed and nothing happened, though it was clear from the pug-marks, coming and going, that the leopard

was still in the Tea. The Assam Trunk Road ran for half a mile along one side of the estate, and there was one small block of Tea on the far side. We hoped the leopard might take up its abode in that corner, but there were no signs that it had ever crossed the road. The pluckers always kept well bunched now, the sirdars with their lathis and knives reluctantly guarding the flanks —a ring of scouts beyond them. It certainly seemed that the first situation report was correct. The leopard had used the block of overgrown Tea as a hide-out while it raided the open country beyond. Now it had either left the district for a better hunting-ground or it had found heavier cover. But of this there was no proof.

Positively the next appearance occurred one sticky afternoon in August, just before the pluckers brought in the day's leaf. The leopard was seen to walk coolly across the main path from the factory, out of one block of Tea into another which the pluckers had just left. A dozen persons saw it, and a coolie woman cried out. The news quickly spread *via* the factory to the Manager's bungalow, and in a very short time my friend Richard was on the scene. I formed up some of the labour force, and armed with tins, drums, cymbals, and other percussion instruments obtained from the coolie lines, we began to drive the leopard. It was a fairly dangerous manœuvre, but what else could we do? Richard was a safe shot, and if he caught sight of the cat at close range it was as good as dead—or was it?

The drive seemed to be going according to plan, the men well spaced, the two horns gradually pressing in from the flanks. Visible only from the waist up, the men forced themselves through the tightly grown bushes. A wave of noise moved in front of them.

Now, the leopard was certainly there, somewhere. At least, he had been seen to go in; he had not been seen to come out. When he did he would emerge into the alley which Richard's rifle covered from end to end. The climax was approaching. A couple of quail flew low, and a very frightened jungle cock rose with a screech and went off at a tangent, cackling. The leopard must appear within a few minutes now and make its bid for freedom. Time and space were running out. I almost felt sorry for it; it hadn't a chance.

Then at a stroke, by one of those unpredictable accidents, the hunted turned the tables, almost became the hunter. Five yards to go, and a crescendo of noise as the line surged forward. Almost at the last minute the leopard came out of the Tea—but not where it was expected. It broke back through the line, jumped calmly over the small road at right angles to the one Richard was watching, and disappeared in a flash. A score of people watched it with open mouths and popping eyes.

Richard could not fire for fear of hitting one of the beaters.

That leopard had certainly learnt the military virtue of surprise. If animals have a sense of humour, how it must have grinned!

Richard was naturally annoyed, but there was nothing we could do about it. The beaters were hardly to blame. One of them must almost have stepped on it as it crouched *ventre à terre* before making its spring, to let the line pass over it. Richard shouted to the beaters to carry on and clear the block.

Suddenly an old grey-haired Santal shouted: "Look, look! Just there!"

"What is it? Where?"

"There, under the bush!" He pointed a shaky finger, nodding his head like a mandarin. An exceptionally large Tea-bush stood at the corner of a row, almost on the edge of the path. There certainly *was* something there. The leopard back again! The beaters reached the last row, and a few seconds later began to appear on the path.

Bang! The men dashed forward as Richard fired. *Bang* again! Some of the coolies bent down, and then from under the big Tea-bush they dragged forth the dead body of a nine-foot tiger; shot through the heart!

Well, there it was. Yet to have pursued a leopard—which everyone had been after for the last fortnight—only to lose it while everyone looked on; and to shoot a full-sized tiger instead, which nobody knew was there, seemed to us queer. Nor did we ever see the leopard again.

After leaving Qwong I returned to my profession of plant hunting, which includes the Tea tree within its orbit. Tea is, in botanical circles, Camellia, and belongs to the same genus of plants as those much-admired pink, white, or red-flowered Japanese and Chinese garden Camellias. As everybody knows, England originally obtained all her Tea from China. Not more than a century ago the Tea clippers raced home from Foochow and Canton, taking several months over the voyage.

But when, at an earlier date, difficulties with the Chinese authorities arose, and the valuable Tea trade was threatened with strangulation, efforts had been made to discover whether Tea could be cultivated in East India. Apart from the desirability of having an alternative source for Tea, there was the further advantage that Calcutta was nearly two thousand miles nearer to London than Canton.

The British Government of that day therefore appointed a commission, which included a distinguished botanist, Dr William Griffith, to visit Assam and report on the prospects of growing Tea there. A few years previously the presence of *wild* Tea had been reported from that province. Whether wild or not, the plant was certainly Tea (this was confirmed by Dr

Griffith), though rather different in appearance from the Tea seen growing near Foochow. If it was wild, then surely it might be cultivated; if it was *not* wild, then it must at one time have been cultivated, and run wild later.

The commission reported favourably, and Englishmen began to cultivate and manufacture Tea in Assam, thereby laying the foundations of a great industry. By the time the China trade found itself in difficulties, the centre of the Tea trade had already shifted fifteen hundred miles westwards.

But meanwhile England had become so accustomed to drinking China Tea that it was thought advisable to introduce the China Tea-bush into Assam rather than try to accustom the Western palate to a new flavour. This was an unfortunate decision, if only because China Tea does not do so well there as the indigenous variety; though naturally it took some time to discover that. For the last thirty or forty years immense efforts have been made—and much money spent—to eliminate "China" from Assam, though it is the only variety grown in Darjeeling and in the Ceylon Highlands. Most Assam Tea today is "China hybrid."

In 1948 my wife and I went plant hunting in the mountains of East Manipur. Soon I began to hear vague rumours of wild Tea in the savage gorges bordering on Burma. But it was difficult to get authentic information. As we plunged into the tangle of jungle-covered hills which guard the frontier, the Tea seemed to retreat before us. It was always farther east; always two or three marches away, as elusive as the Tibetan "unicorn's" home. It seemed impossible to travel fast enough to catch up with it. Then one day we were, as children say, "warm." An old Kuki headman visited our camp on the slopes of Hkayam Bum and swore that he would show us wild Tea.

"Trees, forty feet high," he said.

"Scattered in the jungle?" I asked incredulously, "or just planted in the forest as you see them in Western China?" (No Tea known to man grows forty feet high.)

"Scattered in the jungle," he replied. "Not planted; wild."

I asked him if he could bring me specimens, and he went off, promising to do so. Four days later he returned.

"The big Tea trees have all been cut down," he said apologetically. "The people have been burning the forest round there and much of it has been destroyed."

My heart sank.

"However," he went on, "I have brought you these."

"These"—whatever sized tree had borne them and wherever they had come from—were specimens of authentic Tea; and my spirits revived as I looked at them. Was I, for the first time since those dim ages thousands of years back, when hill tribes

somewhere in South-East Asia had noticed the aromatic plant, on the threshold of discovering *wild* Tea? It seemed too good to be true.

I arranged with our Kuki friend to lead us to the spot, and we started next morning. Three days of gruelling travel up and down the steep mountain-sides, across profound valleys and swollen rivers, along rough stony paths (often in heavy rain), brought us to Mollen, a poor little Kuki village on the flank of the frontier range. Right above us, on the stark sandstone cliffs, clusters of fan palm were silhouetted against the brazen sky; they looked like prehistoric trees from the coal measures come to life. Two thousand feet below us the Nam Panga flowed between thickly forested slopes. Near the bottom a naked sugar-loaf hill stood prominently isolated.

"You see that hill?" said our guide. "On the other side of it Tea grows."

The following day was a memorable one. We set out early to climb fifteen hundred feet up the sandstone cliffs, over which the rigid fan palms and screw pines stood sentinel, in order to look into Burma. Returning to the village we then made a long, exhausting descent to the base of the sugar-loaf hill. We had to go half-way round the base of it to reach the far side, and in the heavy, windless air of that fine May day the sweat poured off us. At last we plunged into the jungle and shade; and before we had gone half a mile we came to a grove of Tea trees. As our guide had warned us, they were not big (very far from forty feet high), and they were certainly not of venerable age; but at least they were genuine Tea trees.

I came to the conclusion, however, that though they grew in jungle, more or less mixed up with and surrounded by a variety of trees, the jungle itself was not "climax," but secondary, and that the Tea might well be the self-sown offspring of parents which had long ago been semi-cultivated here. (Tea is semi-cultivated in Yunnan to this day, growing up in the forest which is later thinned out except for the tallest trees, leaving mainly Tea.) I felt fairly certain that Mollen Tea must be at least a new variety, and my delight was only slightly tarnished by the fact that no seed was available now. But I could return in the autumn and collect that.

I had sent our servants on ahead first thing in the morning, with instructions to camp by the river, since that was the direction in which the Tea lay; and anyhow we had to cross the river in order to get back to Ukhrul. As we were now near the bottom of the valley, I supposed that all we had to do was to descend to the river and follow it up a couple of miles to our prospective camp. I expected to get there in an hour at most. Far from it! Hour after hour we slogged

along through the steaming jungle by a scarcely visible track, climbing all the time, tripping over roots, stumbling over rocks, being stung by nettles, scratched by thorns, bitten by leeches. The heat was intense, the still air supercharged with moisture. We struggled on, sweating and swearing, till we at last reached the main path close to Mollen, and could again look down on to the sugar-loaf peak which had been the cause of all our toil.

We were again two thousand feet above the river, instead of beside it; but almost immediately we began to descend a precipitous spur by a track which led straight to the bottom of the valley. Some two hours later we reached the river-bed and threw ourselves down on the hot sand. Just across the water we spied our tents. The sun was still high in the south-west; but after eight hours' toil in the heat of the day it seemed wonderful to have reached camp. We changed out of our wet clothes and lay around, drinking many cups of tea. We bathed, sunned ourselves on the warm rocks, and repeated the performance several times. It was a delicious evening, and after our strenuous efforts we were only too happy to relax. We had an early supper while it was still twilight, lit the hurricane-lamp, and prepared for bed.

One minute the velvet sky was spangled with a thousand stars, twinkling points of light; ten minutes later a heavy blanket of cloud was being trailed across it, and down came the rain. A wind sprang up, and the outer fly of the tent began to flap violently.

"Douse the glim!" I yelled suddenly as lightning danced over valley and hill. I had seen something. . . .

Too late! Already a swarm of white ants had flown into the tent, driven by the rain and attracted by the hurricane-lamp; and more followed every minute. Soon there were hundreds, shedding their wings as they arrived, crawling inside our blankets, inside our pyjamas, everywhere, while gauzy wings rained down on us. The tickling sensation of these active, podgy insects was frightful. They were all over us; and though we almost asphyxiated ourselves under the blankets, trying to escape their attention, we were always in contact with them. They drove us frantic; nothing we could do had the slightest effect. Outside they were coming up out of the earth, softened by the rain, in millions. Their restless activity was astonishing. . . .

There was not much sleep for anyone that night. Next morning, feeling tired and depressed, we broke camp and continued our journey back to Ukhrul, reached on the fourth day. We had worked hard for our wild Tea.

When, six months later, I visited the Tea Research Station and displayed with pardonable pride my specimens, "Hmm!" said the botanist. "Nice specimens, those. Dark-leafed Burma

type. Did this come from Burma ? "

" No," I said, " from Manipur. That is, yes—in a manner of speaking."

I had forgotten that my plants from sugar-loaf hill grew in the valley of the Nam Panga, which a few miles below Mollen opens wide and flat into the Chindwin valley ! Thus there was ample opportunity for Tea-bushes, as grown by the Shans in the Chindwin valley, to penetrate some miles at least into Manipur *via* the Nam Panga !

And that is exactly what had happened.

South-east of Sadiya, at the top of the Assam valley and only seventy miles distant in a straight line, rises the prominent peak called Dapha Bum, just over 15,000 feet high. It is easily visible from Sadiya on a clear day, its summit snow-clad for half the year. For fifty years it has intrigued naturalists, and it is still inviolate.

Early in 1949 my wife and I determined to reconnoitre the approaches to Dapha Bum from the Kamlang River, which drains its northern slopes. We were not the first explorers of the Kamlang valley, nor could there be any question of climbing the mountain at that season. Leaving Sadiya by car towards the middle of March, we crossed the Lohit with elephants and reached Chongkam, a Shan village on the south bank of the Lohit (reminder that it was the Shans who, coming in from the eastward about seven hundred years ago, had conquered Assam. The Chongkam Shans stem from a more recent immigration). At Chongkam we embarked with all our kit in half a dozen dug-out canoes, which, though thirty to forty feet long, were barely eighteen inches in the beam amidships and had very little freeboard. Indeed, one or two of the more heavily laden were almost awash. Thus we paddled and tracked slowly up the Kamlang River against a fast current.

As we approached the foothills on the third day the water became very rough and progress correspondingly slow. The rapids were violent after recent heavy rain. One canoe capsized, and, finding it too dangerous to proceed by water, we landed, and next day continued our journey on foot, with Mishmi tribesmen to carry our loads. After three days' climbing in the hills we reached the last Mishmi village not far from a deep lake.

Though now only fifteen miles from Dapha Bum, it was for all practical purposes as far off as ever, owing to the denseness of the jungle and the steepness of the slopes. However, it was possible to circumnavigate the lake by raft, and it was round its edge that we found the most interesting plants.

After considerable frustration from Mishmi moods and bad weather, we camped on a ridge several hundred feet above the lake, with prospects of going higher. A small clearing had

been made for the tents, and while chopping away at an awkward stump which had been left standing, I suddenly noticed with a start that I was actually hacking at a Tea tree—or something so like it that, in the absence of flowers and fruit, it was indistinguishable from Tea. An intensive hunt round produced one more small tree. Decidedly it was not common, nor was there much room for doubt that it was wild—otherwise how could it have reached this wild country, where no cultivation had ever been? Its habitat was very different from that of the "wild" Tea of Manipur.

From this camp we cut our way yard by yard up the ridge, through dense thickets of prickly cane, bamboo, and other obstructions. It was steep and slippery, but we managed to ascend another two thousand feet, to reach the lower belt of tree rhododendrons. But no Tea. However, on our way back to the Mishmi village I found, growing in the dense jungle by the lake-side, a fair-sized tree of spreading habit, with leaves closely resembling Tea, though it was the half-ripe fruits that first attracted my attention. They looked like outsize Tea fruits. It must be a Camellia, I thought, in spite of its enormous capsules. Not far from it grew more authentic Tea trees, similar to the one I had noticed in our lake camp.

On our return to the plains I showed my specimens of the indisputable Tea tree to the botanist at Tocklai.

"*This*," I said, proudly displaying the first exhibit, "must be the type of all wild Tea."

"It is undoubtedly Tea," he replied, "rather like 'dark Burma' in shape. Is it really wild, though?"

"I don't see why not," I replied cautiously. "I found it growing in the wildest jungle, far from the madding crowd, away up in the hills."

"I would like to grow it," he said.

"No seed, I'm afraid. No flowers or even young fruits either. It was too early in the season for that. Nothing but Tea leaves."

"A pity," he replied. "You've got something there.... Hullo, what's this?"

He was gazing at specimens of the mysterious tree, so like a Camellia and yet so different.

"I don't know. That's for *you* to say. It looks to me like Tea."

"Of course it's Tea! Look at the leaves!"

"Look at the fruit, rather. As large as walnuts! Have you ever seen Tea like it before?"

He confessed that he had not. "Still, I don't see what else it could be, though the fruits are certainly enormous."

"A polyploid, perhaps. This is a region of polyploids, which not infrequently produce giant flowers, or are themselves gigantic."

"Did you get seed of it, or young plants?"

"Neither," I confessed sadly. "As you see, the fruits are not ripe, and I found only a solitary tree, without even flowers."

"That's unfortunate," he remarked. "Both these plants would be worth cultivating. I shall have to send someone to get seed of them—or go myself."

"They might well prove worth it to the breeder," I said.

There could be no doubt but that some day both plants would be in cultivation, though we might have to wait fifty years before the next step is taken.

So the Kamlang valley, too, has its secrets.

As all the world knows, communications across the jungle-covered hills which divide Assam from Burma were non-existent when the Japanese overran Burma and threatened Assam. So the Ledo Road was built to help in the reconquest of Burma. But no sooner was the war over than maintenance of the road ceased, and straightway it began to deteriorate. Up to the cold weather of 1947, however, it was still possible to drive a jeep over the famous Pangsau Pass and into the Hukawng valley. So long as the wooden bridges remained, there was no reason why one should not go right through to Myitkyina on the Irrawaddy, which used to be railhead in Burma; some people did.

A friend who had been working on the old trail in the early days before the new road was built drew my attention to the fact that Tea grew in the hills here, far away from any village. He had seen it. Might it not be truly wild? Well, it *might* be. More likely it was naturalised. Yet there is always the possibility that Tea will be discovered wild in the unexplored Patkoi range—that is, somewhere between India and China. I was invited to investigate the matter.

A planter friend made all the necessary arrangements, and three of us set off in two jeeps on our quest. The third member of the party, whom I will call X., was an enthusiastic shikari and brought gun and rifle; indeed, it was for the chance of some shooting that he came. We drove out through the little town of Ledo where the railway ends, past the coal-mines and the Chinese cemetery (neglected and overgrown), the rusting sinews of war lying beside the road, the collecting dumps, and so at last into the virgin jungle blazoned now with the blood-red of Erythrina and the duller scarlet of the silk-cotton tree. Then came the long zigzag ascent to the Pangsau Pass, and the air grew colder. So far the road was in very fair condition. One wooden bridge over a nullah was broken down, but we got by. At another point on a level arc of road we came abruptly to a two-foot vertical step, invisible till we were on to it. We hit it with such a crack that we were almost flung out of our seats, but the jeep

took it in its stride. On the whole, however, the road was in much better condition than I had expected. We met no traffic; the road to Burma was deserted now.

From the top of the Pangsau Pass we looked back over seemingly endless ranges of rippling hills; suety white clouds hung heavy over the land and hid the blue horizon. How that view must have struck like a death-knell into the hearts of the refugees in 1942! Five hundred feet below us on the Burma side lay the dark, silent tarn said to be shunned by all forms of life—bird, fish or mammal—but so difficult of access that no careful observer has been able either to confirm or deny this legend. Late that afternoon we reached Tagap, a small Naga village of wretched little huts fifty miles inside Burma. At the top end of the clearing was a bamboo rest-hut, rather tumble-down; and close by, under a *basha*, an American army lorry with one or two other trucks lying about, half dismantled. Plainly, Tagap had not been overlooked by the treasure hunters.

A dozen persons, men and women, crowded round us as we turned aside from the main road and halted beside the rest-hut. They spoke no language known to us, but with a few sentences of Burmese we identified the headman. Then a dark-skinned man with long fuzzy hair hanging down, dressed in conventional Naga costume but obviously an Indian, guardedly confessed to a knowledge of Hindustani. What he thought of our project, and what he said to his friends about us, we had no means of discovering; for he spoke in the Naga tongue. Obviously they were ill at ease. They all kept looking covertly at us, glancing away at the army truck, then glancing guiltily as it seemed at the road below, which swooped in steep curves round the valley, and then away south in the direction of Shingbwiyang and the sources of the Chindwin.

They were reserved, uncommunicative, but not in any degree hostile. Rather, one might say, they gave the impression of being frightened, or at least worried. They would have been better pleased had we not arrived, and the story we told them—that we had come to look for Tea—must have sounded a poor sort of lie. To come ninety miles from the plains, where Tea grew in thousand-acre blocks, to the hills where a few Tea-bushes were widely scattered throughout hundreds of square miles of dense jungle, and then say that you were searching for Tea, would not deceive a child. But why, then, were these strangers visiting the abandoned road, along which Europeans had ceased to travel? They were not very clever people, it seemed, or they would have invented a more likely story. So those hillmen might have argued.

However, the sly-looking Indian in Naga dress, with the long hair and the crafty expression, told us there were Tea-bushes in the jungle a mile or two distant, and promised to take us to them next morning. And then, rather abruptly, the villagers dispersed to their huts.

We unloaded the jeeps—it is remarkable how much you can pack into a jeep—and settled ourselves into the untidy hut. Hardly had we unrolled our bedding on the floor when we heard the whirr of a six-wheeled lorry in the distance. It changed gear with a rattle as it took the sharp hill up to our village, and next minute had roared up the steep incline, and with a grinding of brakes halted just outside our door. The truck was filled with armed Chinese.

For a minute we stared at each other without speaking. Well, we were in possession. Then the driver backed down the slope, and the men tumbled out by the *basha* where the other truck was housed.

"Now for it!" I said, and we grinned at each other. But Connell looked thoughtful.

"So *that* was what was on the villagers' minds," he remarked genially.

"Bandits?" I asked.

"Might be, of course," Connell replied, "but it hardly makes sense being a bandit on a road which nobody uses."

"Well, there's the pipe-line," said X., "perhaps they're banditing that. Any amount of buried treasure too, and tons of American stuff slung into the jungle worth salvaging. Thousands of pounds worth of abandoned equipment."

"I suppose they come from Myitkyina?"

"Obviously. It's practically a Chinese town now."

"Not a very bright outlook," I said. "We seem to have stepped right into it; unfriendly tribesmen in league with bandits, bandits themselves on a job. We could hardly have chosen a more inconvenient moment to look for Tea. We'd better post sentries tonight and watch out."

"The chap sitting beside the driver gave me a dirty look," said X. "He was like an escaped convict."

But Connell refused to be ruffled.

"My guess is that they'd intended to spend the night in this hut," he said, "and were upset at finding it occupied. The villagers, of course, knew they were coming. Probably they're after bigger game than us."

"Anyway, it would be safest if we all slept in one room," X. said.

"What about the jeeps? The toughs are playing Slippery Sam with them all over the province nowadays."

"Don't worry," said Connell, "we'll take out the distributors, chain the jeeps together, then lash them to the bungalow posts right under our window-frame."

Darkness fell early and it turned cold. A breeze sprang up. We had supper and read

for a bit, feeling uneasily that something was about to happen —we did not know quite what. The village at the foot of the slope was wrapped in darkness, except for the flickering of a log-fire where the Chinese had camped beside their trucks. Silence hung over the jungle. Then far away a sambhur belled. Closer at hand a brain-fever bird called monotonously.

Suddenly, from immediately below, the lorry's engine began to roar; bright lights came on, illuminating our hut, and swept round in a half-circle. The lorry moved slowly down to the main road, the wheels crunching on the gravel, then the clutch was let in and the sound and the lights faded out in the distance.

"I wonder what the game is," I said. "Perhaps they've gone for reinforcements."

"There were enough of them to surround the hut and then send two men to tell us to hand over our arms quietly," Connell replied. "More likely they've gone on shikar."

Connell clearly did not share our fears. And at that moment a shot rang out not far away.

"Listen!" said X., all excitement immediately. But the sound was not repeated. Then he jumped up. "Come on, Connell! We'll take my jeep and go down the road the opposite way to the Chinks. Never mind about them. There's sure to be something here. We might get a sambhur."

Two 12-bores and a rifle, together with two powerful hand-torches, were got ready by these experienced shikaris. I was to sit behind and shine one torch. X. would drive, very slowly, our cook squatting on the running-board with another torch, while Connell sat ready with a gun. So we pushed off, going dead slow down the road, always in the hope that round the next corner our head-lights would reflect back the ruby glow from a deer's eyes while it stood for a moment fascinated, held by the beam. Meanwhile our torches swept the dark bushes beside the winding road. Sure enough, presently we made out the dim shape of a barking deer right alongside the road, but it disappeared in a flash, melting into the shadows. After going a couple of miles we turned the jeep and started back, when X. with uncanny instinct suddenly turned his torch on to a clearing, and two red lights flashed back an answering signal. He seized his rifle and fired immediately, then leapt from the jeep. But presently he returned, shaking his head.

"It was a sambhur," he said. "I clean missed it—not a drop of blood."

When we reached the hut Abdul, our bearer, who had been gossiping in the village, told us that the Chinese had in fact been out shooting. Apparently they often went out with torches and nearly always got something. ("Perhaps they thought we were going to spoil their fun, butting in like this," X. said.)

Just then we heard the lorry coming up the road, and Abdul went down to see what he could discover. Later he told us that the Chinese had shot a sambhur and a black bear. We locked the jeeps together, as arranged, and turned in.

Despite our misgivings we slept soundly that night. Next morning, however, the village seemed strangely deserted, and after an early breakfast we waited in vain for the sinister Indian guide. At last I grew impatient.

"Look, Connell," I said, "I'm going to stroll down to the village and try to find the man who spoke Burmese, or if possible make friends with the Chinese. We shan't get anywhere at this rate."

I went off towards the huts, and as I passed the truck I noticed the Chinese squatting round a fire under the *basha*, eating. I decided to try and break the ice with them in spite of their grimly silent inspection of us the previous evening.

"*Fan che-lo mai-yo*," I called out, in what was intended to be honeyed tones. (Probably the wrong tones anyway, I thought to myself.)

They stared at me, then went on pushing rice into their mouths with chopsticks, and I felt rather foolish, forgetting that a Chinese almost always pretends not to comprehend a word of what you say when you first address him in what you imagine to be his own language. Perhaps it is part of his creed, extending back through two hundred generations, that his ancestors invented unique speech while the barbarians were still inarticulate and could never imitate or even understand him; merely make noises. I tried again.

"*Tso-wan-shang ta-lo shen-mo*."

At that, one of them grinned. Had a spark of understanding been struck between us, I wondered. The man rose, came quietly towards me. The others continued to eat, dumb as images. The little Chinese, who seemed to be in charge, was dressed in the blue uniform of the old army, and wore a peaked cap pulled jauntily over one eye. He grinned, and I felt I was getting on fine.

"Your honourable name?" he asked politely as he came near me.

"My name is Flower," I replied, while frantically dredging my mind for some more Chinese opening chit-chat.

"Please come and eat," he went on, but I had finished my breakfast and declined the rhetorical invitation.

At this moment Connell strolled up, and in his breezy manner said with a disarming smile, "Good-morning, gentlemen."

The little Chinese smiled back and replied in good English, though with a strong American accent, "Good-morning. I've met you before somewhere, I think. Yes?"

"During the war, perhaps," said Connell. "I was on the Ledo Road in the early days, attached to Thirty-fifth Brigade."

"I was Staff Captain. Li Sung my name. I remember you now; we met here, I think."

They continued to swap reminiscences, and soon we were all good friends. It was explained that I wanted to see Tea growing in the jungle and that I required a guide. Instantly Captain Li Sung got hold of the villagers and issued orders. There was no doubt who was boss in this village. Half an hour later I set out, with two guides (not the Indian—he had disappeared), over the hills, following a barely visible track.

The going was rough, the country a huddle of low hills leading gradually up to higher ridges. In about an hour we reached the forest on the far side of the valley. There were no big trees, no lianas to trip over, very little undergrowth. Probably it was all second growth and less than a century old. The hillside was steep here, the ground hard, with low outcrops of rock; and though there were no obvious signs of cultivation, it could scarcely be doubted that at an earlier period the ridge had been cleared by man.

Presently we found our first Tea-bush. It was not very big—ten or twelve feet high—but at least it had never been pruned. (On the plains unpruned Tea eventually grows twenty to twenty-five feet high.) After that came another, and another, all of them of a type, small bushes with dark-green leaves, scattered through the copse yet with some vague appearance of order. Further exploration revealed that they were concentrated on the sunny side of the ridge, and were in fact the survivors—perhaps the surviving progeny—of a small colony. I was looking at a lost village site where a hundred years ago—and possibly a hundred years before that—primitive hill tribes had lived and cultivated Tea before the British occupation of Assam and the birth of the Indian Tea industry. There were neither flowers nor fruit on my Tea-bushes, and they were too big to dig up.

I then began crawling beneath them in search of baby plants. After a long search we found a few, but so hard was the ground that we had some difficulty in digging them up, the stout tap-root going down deep in search of water. However, eventually we carried six little plants back to camp.

That same afternoon we left Tagap, and after various stoppages halted by a stream for the night, having come half-way. Next morning we completed the journey to Margherita, with our Naga Tea plants safe in bamboo baskets. They, too, survived the journey back to Tocklai, and were planted out. They had lost every leaf they ever

possessed, but the warmth and moisture of the plains soon brought them round, and by May they were putting out vigorous new shoots.

Back in Margherita we told the Political Officer, who dealt with the tribes of the Patkoi range, of our adventure with the Chinese "bandits" and its happy sequel, and about the sinister Indian who lived in the Naga village. Johnnie W. pricked up his ears at mention of the Indian.

"Had he a squint?" he asked.

"Now you mention it, I remember he did have a cast in one eye," I said. "I didn't notice him very closely, though I should certainly recognise him again."

Johnnie laughed. "You've described Ali all right. We've been trying for months to get him, but he slipped over the frontier into Burma some time ago. Not that that matters much up here, but it makes it more difficult for us."

"What's he wanted for?" I asked.

"Oh, murder and a few other misdemeanours. A slippery chap. I'm not surprised he wouldn't go with you into the jungle. Of course, he suspected you of being police spies. He thought you meant to entice him into the jungle and then hit him over the head. I'll bet you never saw his face again after that first meeting. But how he must have smiled to himself at your tea-time story!"

VICTOR AND THE VANQUISHED.

BY H. D. BALL.

I.

WHEN Alison Arnott was eighteen she left the convent school in Gloucestershire where she had been brought up and went to live with, and keep house for, her father, Colonel Arnott of Somersall Manor. Alison had been motherless since infancy, and Colonel Arnott, although an unyielding pillar of the Church of England, who took his turn at reading the lesson on a Sunday morning with the greatest regularity, had decided that a convent would more effectively supply the dual needs of a mother and an education than any other institution that he knew of.

It might be thought that Alison was over-young to be mistress of a place like Somersall Manor; but if the convent had not made a mathematician of her, or rounded off her Latin, it had been careful to teach her how to carve and how to look after linen, how to walk and talk and how to look after guests; also how to comport herself towards her elders and betters. That other knowledge, equally important, of how to comport herself towards her inferiors, had grown up with her; for she had been used to servants and village people all her life. She took up her new duties without embarrassment, simply, directly, and with an unassuming certainty; and that was because she took them up under her father's ægis, under his orders, as it were. She had not to consider whether she trod an authentic path, or whether she trod the primrose way that leads to snares and pitfalls; she had only to tread the path that was marked out for her by trusted authority.

But if Colonel Arnott had unloaded most of his responsibility upon the multiple shoulders of the convent, he had not neglected the one accomplishment which it was in his power to bestow; and during every school holiday he had put Alison to school again, and upon the back of a horse, until she could sit any mount without disgracing her parentage, and ride to hounds without committing a solecism.

She was so like her mother that the Colonel could never look at her without being pierced with mingled anguish and delight, and harrowed with the dread that she, like the former Alison Arnott, might be cut off untimely, in the manner of young growth in an April frost; but he had only to see her as she came in from riding, her apple-blossom complexion nut-tinted with sun and wind, to

feel that if this were so, it could only be through the strike of some Jovian bolt; through flying splinters in another war among the nations, or a flying chimney-pot in some war among the elements.

When she came home, the latest war among the nations had just ended. Now, near the beginning of it, a large and empty country house not far from the Manor had been taken as the headquarters of the *n*th A.A. Group, and Colonel Arnott had thrown open his doors to both officers and men, with a freedom of hospitality that had met with grateful (and all-embracing) approval: the men found the kitchens a kindly and tolerant home-from-home, and the officers converted the dining-room and library into a secondary Mess, more friendly and informal than their own at "Overlands." When the war was over, the *n*th A.A. Group stayed on; when Alison came home, the Colonel continued his hospitality, with her to help him. She acted as hostess: at dinner, she sat beside her father at the head of the table, quietly attentive to all that went on, as unobtrusive as a hedge-sparrow, as thoughtful for the guests as a matron of mature experience. Neither did she despise the Other Ranks: to the wives of such as were married she contrived to smuggle an occasional delicacy—half a rabbit or a couple of eggs; not much, since they had not much to give, but enough to earn appreciation. In no time she had been adopted by the unit *en bloc* as its mascot. The officers all fell in love with her; indeed, it became *de rigueur* in the Mess to worship at her shrine; and an unwritten law in its code of honour was to pay gallant and chivalrous court to her. The men followed suit, in their own way; and she never met, either riding side-saddle sedately to a meet on her bay hunter, or trotting into the village, in jodhpurs and jersey, astride a neat brown cob—she never met a man of them, I say, without being smartly saluted (as if she had been their Colonel-in-Chief), and without receiving a cheerful grin and a bright "Good-day!"

Mrs Hardy, the vicar's wife, remonstrated with the Colonel.

"Do you think it's wise, Colonel," she would say, "to have so many men about the house, now Alison is at home? She knows very little about her fellow men and women—especially the men. It's like letting a puppy loose in a pork-shop."

"Pooh!" the Colonel would retort. "There's safety in numbers."

In the event, he was proved to be right; but perhaps the manner of the proving was other than he would have chosen. Alison was a serious-minded young woman, fully expecting to fall in love very soon and to live happily ever after; though her definition of living happily was not to dwell in a halcyon's paradise, eating lotus and forgetting toil: she had no objection to rubs and crosses; her

only stipulation to fate was that they should be shared with the perfect companion. She wanted to be in love, and to be loved; she wanted to be a good wife to a good husband. The pain of possibly loving without being loved, though she felt it to exist, had no terrors for her, partly because she had not experienced it, partly because she was disinclined to flee from it if she did, being disinclined to flee from anything romantic and honest, however painful it might be. Besides, to love was the main thing, and more important than the being loved. The consequence of this was that she could not meet a man without asking herself whether she could love him; and she could not meet him several times without asking herself whether she did love him. More often than not the answer was an instant negative, for she had quick and instinctive feelings; but where she liked a man, it gave her a pleasurable sense of luxury to question herself and to weigh him against others whom she also liked. This sketches her as a heartless little coquette; which is what she might have been, but that her search was serious; she was hunting a soul-mate, much as in a search for supper-partners the owner of "Romeo," upon one slip of paper, looks for the owner of "Juliet" upon another.

Among the galaxy of her satellites were three who took a more than conventional interest in her; and these three were, in order of seniority, Major Gregory Grampian, Captain Vyvyan Hope, and Second-Lieutenant Harry Foster. Harry Foster was nearest to her in age, a very young man indeed, of a pink soap-and-water complexion, very public-school and very officer-and-gentleman. Captain Hope was older, in the middle thirties, perhaps; a handsome man, and an acknowledged lady-killer; and Gregory Grampian was older still.

Mr Foster developed a habit of calling at the Manor, on some pretext or other, whenever he was passing: Alison did not mind; but he called once too often, both for himself as a successful suitor and for her. Someone else was there before him, Private Dunne having called at the back door in search of someone to poultice a boil on his hand, preferring that to a visit to the M.O.; and when Foster, having been sent round from the front, came into the kitchen himself, it was to find Alison busy with bandages and scissors. She might, possibly, have been wiser to have left Private Dunne to the housekeeper; but when Private Dunne knocked at the back door, Alison was in the kitchen tying bunches of lavender for drying, while the housekeeper was upstairs. Without more ado, she set about Private Dunne herself, with Peggy the kitchen-maid to act as receptionist and dispenser, boiling kettles, setting basins, breaking bread for a poultice, and tearing strips of clean old linen for a bandage. It would be difficult to say which

was the more taken aback, Mr Foster or Private Dunne. Private Dunne climbed laboriously out of the wooden tub-chair in which he was sitting, and saluted, but neither very smartly, nor, since he was hatless, very correctly. Mr Foster returned the salute with a neatness and precision worthy of recommendation to those lackadaisical officers who think anything good enough for a private; but the motive behind it, alas! was to bring home to Private Dunne the enormity of his shortcomings. Mr Foster then removed, tardily, his own cap.

Alison greeted him with friendliness, although she sensed the electricity in the air. In the kitchen window stood a little table covered with a chequered cloth, on which Peggy was setting out cups and saucers, the cup-of-tea stage being imminent.

"Hello, Harry!" said Alison in her innocence. "You're just in time for a cup of tea. Peggy, another cup and saucer for Mr Foster, please."

The natural pink of Mr Foster's complexion, like that of a white-heart cherry, changed to the bright red of a Siberian crab as he replied, "I am sorry, Miss Alison. I'm in a hurry, as it happens, and only called to leave these magazines which Mrs Bridges thought you might like to look at."

He put the magazines down on the nearest chair, and Alison said quietly, "Thank you, Harry. And thank Mrs Bridges for me, will you? I'm sorry you won't stay, but if you're in a hurry I mustn't keep you. Good-bye."

She smiled, but it was mechanically. He saluted and went out. With great kindness, Alison urged Private Dunne to sit at the table, and herself sat down and drank a cup of tea with him. Mr Foster might claim urgency of business, but she was not deceived; what ailed him was the sitting down with a private, though neither was on duty, and although they met in unconventional circumstances. She set him down for what he was: a boy with much to learn, a schoolboy still in the lowest classroom of experience, and since she wanted a man she could look up to, that was the end of the episode of Harry Foster.

As Mr Foster retired, Captain Hope advanced. He had been there all the time, in the background, gallant and charming, paying little attentions but by no means forcing himself upon her notice. He now came forward, irresistible with curling black hair, red handle-bar moustache, and dazzling smile; irresistible with his easy urbanity, irresistible with his technique and his reputation. Alison was young enough to fancy it might be delightful to be loved by a handsome man-of-the-world, and to swell with virtuous and egotistical pleasure at the thought of possibly reforming a rake. Certainly she found him a more conversable and capable companion than young Foster. One evening, whether by accident or

design, they met in the hall. He pulled her to him and kissed her, with more violence than tenderness. She struggled, and he let her go, knowing it was too public a place in which to risk being found by others. As she fled upstairs she gave him a look of such fiery scorn as shrivelled up his chances for ever. She avoided him after that, despising herself being a sufficient reason for doubly despising him. That was the end of the episode of Captain Hope.

And Gregory Grampian? There never was any episode, so far as he was concerned. He was at least forty-five, grizzled of hair and grizzled of face. His attitude towards her was a compound of the fatherly and the brotherly, and their friendship was sound, if stilted: yet he worshipped the ground she walked upon, and would willingly have sacrificed himself to spare her pain in her little finger.

About the time of Captain Hope's defeat Sir Gervaise Gaunt came home from the Rhine. The petals, the spell, of her apple-blossom charm at once fell upon him also. Colonel Arnott was delighted; for the Gaunt estates marched with his own, and since he was by now reconciled to the idea of an early marriage for his daughter, a marriage that should not take her far away from him pleased him more than any. Sir Gervaise was eligible enough; young, but not too young; well-built and fond of hunting; and a friend of the family, if a stranger to Alison. She almost fled to him as to a refuge from, and an antidote to, Captain Hope. In a very short time an implicit engagement was understood to exist, although an explicit one might still require ratification. It was felt that Colonel Arnott would give consent, and that all parties were merely waiting upon Time to ripen a sympathy into a betrothal.

II.

Such was the state of affairs in the placid mill-pond of Somersall when Paul Andrew Jelliboff dropped into it like a pebble from heaven, ruffling its surface with a widening circle of eddying disturbance.

Colonel Arnott was in the post-office one morning, when Mrs Bardill, the postmistress (and a walking Exchange and Mart of gossip), informed him that Farm Cottage was sold at last, and to a Pole. Farm Cottage stood on the opposite side of the road to the Colonel's main lodge-gates, and had originally been a row of four labourers' cottages which an enterprising architect of the 1930's had knocked into one. It had a garden, an orchard and a paddock, and had latterly stood empty.

"A Pole!" exclaimed the Colonel. "Good Lord! Am I to have a foreign dago on my doorstep?"

To the Colonel all foreigners were dagoes, from whatever airt they hailed; and he disliked them all with equal intensity, on the undebatable ground that they were not English.

"I suppose he'll fill his house with cronies," he continued gloomily. "And then there'll be riots. Razor and bottle fights: you'll see."

A few days later he was dining in the Mess at "Overlands" and found himself being introduced to a fellow guest —to Colonel Prince Jelliboff. Colonel Arnott was thunderstruck; was this, then, the foreign dago on his doorstep? Now all the world had heard of Colonel Prince Jelliboff; of how he had escaped from Poland at the beginning of the war, smuggling with him several thousand pounds' worth of pearls and diamonds, concealed, some inside the hollow stems of a self-propelling pencil and of an old-fashioned fountain-pen, some sewn into the layers of leather which comprised the heels of his boots, and some (and this was the masterpiece) camouflaged in a bottle of the Polish equivalent of Beecham's Pills, which a chemist friend had forged for him, hiding a pearl in the middle of each pill; of how he had reached England after a journey of hazards and perils; and of how he had joined the British Army as a subaltern, and risen spectacularly in the course of a few years to the rank of full Colonel, through sheer brilliance and daring.

Colonel Arnott's feelings were in that most irritating of states, indetermination. To his dislike of the foreign dago was now added the dislike of having to revise his estimates; for Jelliboff was quiet and unassuming, and if his English was too precise for that of an Englishman, at least it held no bizarre accent. In the other pan of the scales were the admiration and respect that Colonel Arnott in his honesty was bound to feel for a man of Jelliboff's record, a man who was the Colonel's equal in military rank and his superior in civil; and before the evening was over, Colonel Arnott's natural courtesy, which would never have dreamed of slighting a stranger, much less a distinguished one, had triumphed over his huffiness, and he had invited Jelliboff to lunch the next day, with a rider that the Prince should come early and inspect the Somersall collection of arms and armour. Jelliboff bowed, and expressed himself both delighted and honoured.

(There had been consternation in the Mess when it became known who was to be their guest; and some of the younger officers had asked Lieutenant-Colonel Bridges, the officer in command of the unit, how they should address him. "Well," replied Bridges, "we can't call him 'Highness,' because he isn't a prince of the blood. I suggest we simply call him 'Sir.' We can't go wrong on that." The Mess had been relieved when it had learned that Jelliboff, a prince without

a principality, preferred to be known merely as Colonel.)

Colonel Arnott issued his invitation without misgiving. He suspected no danger. To begin with, Jelliboff's name was against him. No doubt it was innocuous enough in his own tongue, but in English it could only sound foolish. Neither was he a particularly young man, coming somewhere between Captain Hope and Major Grampian in age; nor was he much to look at. He was of middle height, and slightly built. His face was long, and so was his nose; too long. His complexion was sallow. His brown hair was wispy and beginning to thin. His eyes also were brown, very dark, and with a thoughtful and almost dreamy expression, though they could flash fire when the occasion warranted it. The general cast of his countenance was melancholy: but that is flattering it; mournful is really the word. Only his mouth, both sensitive and incisive, suggested the soldier; the mouth of a man quick to make decisions, and to act upon them; of a man who knew his own mind, and had no hesitation in letting others know it, too.

The next morning, returning from a ride with Gervaise Gaunt, Alison found, as she passed through the hall on her way upstairs to change, that the library door was ajar, and that she could hear voices from the other side of it. Alison was at that time bewildered and unhappy, regretting her ready intimacy with Sir Gervaise, who was proving jealous and possessive. She hardly knew whether her resentment of this was justified, or whether she must expect it from any man, and ought to submit to it; but hers was not the temperament to be happy with a uxorious mate; she was like the wild sweet wood anemone, demanding a semblance of freedom even in the midst of protection. And as this anemone of the lovely name, this *nemorosa* of the woodlands, seems to wilt and pine if brought within the four confining walls of a garden, yet flourishes exceedingly if allowed to grow freely beneath its protecting woods, just so was she impatient of restraint, while at the same time she craved for shelter and security. In this predicament she knew the tortures of the undecided; and in this predicament she heard a strange voice from beyond the library door. It pierced her through and through, that voice; it penetrated her bosom, rather than her ears, with the directness of a sword. Afterwards she reflected that images of Cupid's arrows, which she had read about often enough at school and had thought foolish, were no images at all, but truth; and wondered if there might not be more truth in poets' phantasies than is generally supposed. At the moment, she only heard the voice and felt its dart; yet it was no extraordinary voice, no big, manly voice, merely a pleasant baritone, cultured and well-modulated, warm and with a quiet vitality.

Colonel Arnott had heard his daughter's step in the hall. He came out of the library and called her in. He wanted, he said, to present a distinguished stranger to her. She had only to look at Jelliboff, to see him standing there regarding her with his dreamy and yet searching gaze, for her overthrow to be complete. She had no need to ask herself, now, whether she could love this man; she knew that she loved him, and she knew also that, whether for pleasure or for pain, she would never wish to part with the sentiment.

They fell subsequently into a natural and effortless friendship. They talked books and music and philosophy, to Colonel Arnott's disgust and Gervaise Gaunt's dismay; or rather, Jelliboff talked while Alison the neophyte listened: yet, however erudite his talk with Alison might be, with others he seemed as desirous as any Englishman of hiding his erudition under a bushel; except once, when he so far forgot the conventions as to speak too seriously for his company.

The occasion was dinner one evening at Somersall Manor. The cue was a chance question of the Padre's. Jelliboff lived alone at Farm Cottage with a one-armed Sergeant Huffam to "do" for him, earning his living (since most of his small capital had been spent in the purchase and furnishing of the cottage) as a reader and translator for firms who published either Polish books in Polish or English books in Polish for the benefit of Poles in England, or Polish books in English for the benefit of the English. The Padre asked, tentatively, why he preferred doing that to remaining in the army, where a brilliant future awaited him; why he had not stayed with the Forces which he had served so well.

Jelliboff shook his head.

"In another war for the sanctity of the individual, yes," he said. "In peace-time, and for a socialist government, no."

"Nobody takes the government seriously," remarked Hope.

"That is a mistake," replied Jelliboff. "I was brought up in a strict Christian church, and I cannot think lightly of socialism."

"Oh! They're the same thing nowadays," was Hope's careless response. "Everybody says so."

Jelliboff's eyes flashed.

"Never speak the heresy!" he exclaimed. "The analogy is false. Whatever one's views, one cannot deny that the one is spiritual, the other material. There is no analogy. Christ was not interested in a man's material circumstances, except as they affected his spiritual condition. He is concerned over individual souls, reaching their own perfection through their own struggles. He is not impressed by a rich man made poor by the State, unless that man learns humility thereby; nor is he impressed by a poor man made rich by the State, if that man becomes proud and insolent. The sacrifice must be

voluntary, the struggle personal. Communism is not grounded in brotherhood; it is grounded in envy, hatred, discontent, and laziness; yes, laziness, both mental and moral, and . . ."

He stopped abruptly, aware of the embarrassed faces surrounding him.

"I beg your pardon," he said stiffly. "I forget myself. Major Grampian, how is your little dog?"

Grampian's Cairn terrier then became the decoy by which other dogs were drawn into the mesh of the conversation; but Jelliboff's outburst had finally set the seal upon Colonel Arnott's antipathy.

The four men who loved Alison, or who fancied that they loved her, gravitated towards each other through the attraction of a common sympathy. They took counsel together.

"I'll tell you what we must do," said Captain Hope. "We must make a fool of him. No woman loves a fool. They'd rather have a villain than a fool."

"But Jelliboff is not a fool," objected Major Grampian. "So how will you make him look like one?"

"I've got an idea."

"You mean you've got a Hope," murmured the Major.

"We'll take him out huntin'," pursued the Captain, undaunted.

"Hunting?" It was Sir Gervaise who repeated the word.

"Yes. Don't suppose he knows a thing about it. Don't suppose he can ride much, either. Too bookish."

"Has he got a horse?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Well, then . . ."

"You shall lend him one, my Gaunt."

"That's all very well . . ."

"You shall lend him Victor."

"Here, I say!" expostulated Major Grampian, "he'll come to grief."

"All the better if he does."

"No, that's not fair," insisted the Major.

"Yes, it is. All's fair in love and war, and since we are soldiers who are also in love, why then, all is 'Fair and fair and twice so fair, and fair as any may be.' Jelliboff isn't the only one who can philosophise."

"Well, anyway," said the Major, comforting himself, "*you* can't invite him to hunt, and I'm sure Colonel Arnott never will."

"Oh, yes, he will, if it's put to him in the right way."

"And who is to do that?"

"You are, Major," said Hope sweetly.

"*Oh*, no!" Grampian turned on his heel and began to walk away. "I'll have nothing to do with it."

"Oh, I say, look here!" called Hope, in some alarm. "You're not going to rat on us, are you?"

"No," replied the Major over his shoulder. "I won't rat on you; but neither will I be an accessory."

In the end, it fell to Harry Foster to put the idea into Colonel Arnott's head. He watched for his opportunity

and joined them one day when he saw the Colonel and Jelliboff together. Hating his own guile, and blushing for it, yet sticking to his guns because he was pledged to them, he marshalled Captain Hope's suggestions and turned the conversation upon hunting; which was easily done, since the Colonel was only too ready to follow a new lead, and since the season was young, and consequently fruitful of anticipatory discussion. Jelliboff asked curiously (and was it a little wistfully?) if fox-hunting were very enjoyable.

Harry Foster's brain worked with a greater celerity and genius than ever before.

"You ought to try it, sir," he said. "You can't really get an idea of it from what other people say. You ought to try it some time."

Colonel Arnott had received a dig upon his most vulnerable point, the Achilles' heel of his courtesy. As Master of the Somersall hounds he could not, after what had been said, do other than invite Jelliboff to join them the next Saturday; but he would go no further than the bare invitation, offering neither help nor advice. Jelliboff accepted; and before he had time to ask any questions, or seek information, Foster switched the talk on to something else.

The word soon went round.

"I hear you're joining us on Saturday," Sir Gervaise said to Jelliboff.

"Yes."

"What're you doing about a horse?"

"I understand there is a riding-school in the next village, from which a horse may be hired."

"You take my advice, and don't. They're no good. Ridden by any Tom, Dick, and Harry. Ruined. You can have one of mine, if you like."

Jelliboff, as Major Grampian had said, was no fool, and he immediately fell to wondering what might be behind this sudden affability.

"That is kind," he said. "I shall be grateful."

"Then be at my place at half-past seven on Saturday, and there'll be a horse saddled for you," said Gaunt.

At half-past seven on Saturday there were in the stable-yard at Gaunt Place, besides Sir Gervaise and Jelliboff, Captain Hope and Mr Foster, both of whom were being mounted by Sir Gervaise. Gregory Grampian had hired one of the despised riding-school horses and was not present. Jelliboff asked if there was anything particular he should know before they started.

"No, nothing special," replied Gaunt, speaking according to hints given him by Captain Hope. "It's common-sense, really. Hounds may or may not make a kill. If they do, the main thing is to be in at the death. Funny," he added ruminatively, "how women are often clever at it, as they are with dogs. Miss Arnott, for instance; she never gets left

behind, and her father tells me she has successfully ridden a line of her own once already."

Jelliboff was in some doubt what riding a line of one's own might be, but he was no longer in any doubt about the nature of the issue that had been started: this hunt was to be a trial of strength between Sir Gervaise and himself, Alison Arnott the prize. As Sir Gervaise finished speaking the horses were led out, and Jelliboff was invited to inspect the animal destined for him. Victor was a bright chestnut, fresh and fidgety, not bred for hunting, but a good sound horse for all that.

Jelliboff looked him over with a thoughtful face, while the others watched his reactions.

"I do not like his bullet-head," he said at length. "And I do not like his little pig's eyes. I do not like the swish of his tail, nor do I like his colour; for I never yet knew the chestnut horse that had not the temperament of a red-headed woman. But he appears to be built both for speed and for what-do-you-call — staying-power."

He approached Victor with quiet confidence, and Foster called out involuntarily, "Careful! He's corned-up, rather."

"So I see," replied Jelliboff. He spoke to Victor in some incomprehensible Polish stable-jargon, and then ran a hand along the horse's neck and over his shoulder. Victor submitted patiently, if not with complacence.

"Yes," said Jelliboff, standing back. "I think he is a good horse. Thank you, Sir Gervaise. I will ride him with pleasure."

They mounted. An uncertain groom stood by, ready to give Jelliboff a leg-up; but Jelliboff swung himself lightly and gracefully into the saddle, settled himself, and proceeded without fuss or fumbling to adjust the stirrups to his liking. The meet that morning being at the Manor, they had not far to go. As they left the stable-yard the conspirators were a little less complacent. They began to suspect Jelliboff of having seen horses before: what they had overlooked, in their ignorance and conceit, was the rigorous efficiency of the pre-war Polish cavalry school.

At first, all went well. Jelliboff handled Victor easily, even when he played-up, as he did a little from time to time; neither allowing him to crowd, to eat another's mane or tail, nor to kick or be kicked. He knew enough to know that any sport has its etiquette, and he had the sense to watch the others and conform his conduct to theirs: but by-and-by, when a fox broke covert and raced away across the open, with hounds in full cry after him, he forgot all about etiquette and the observance of other people's behaviour, and remembered only that it was his duty to Alison and his own honour to be "in at the death." He gave Victor his head, and went off at a gallop after fox and hounds.

"Gosh!" exclaimed Sir Ger-

vaise, "Victor's away! Bolting, I do believe."

"No, he isn't," said Hope, watching the flying pair with narrowed eyes. "He's being ridden—ridden as I'll be bound he's never been ridden in his life before."

Victor presently overhauled the pack, taking a newly laid hedge in his stride. Jelliboff avoided riding through the thickest of the hounds, but ride through the fringe of them he did, with disastrous results. Too late he saw his mistake, too late he realised what the effect of that thundering chestnut streak must be, on their heels and in their midst. They were upset, unbalanced, thrown into confusion. The fox, as if sensing the different atmosphere behind him, seized his opportunity and changed his direction, and Jelliboff, more accustomed to coursing with dogs of greyhound type, hunting by sight instead of by smell, unwittingly galloped across the line of scent, breaking it with that of his horse and with the wind of his progress. The discomfiture of the pack was complete; the fox dashed into cover. Jelliboff reined in his horse as soon as he could, and turned to face the havoc he had made; turned to face Colonel Arnott, who came pounding up at a canter on his bay heavyweight; turned to face the astounded, angry, and curious field; turned to face Alison Arnott, looking at him, it seemed to him, with puzzled reproach.

"What the devil are you playing at, you—you filleted jellyfish, you?" roared the Colonel.

The onlookers saw Jelliboff stiffen in the saddle. He had been prepared to make profuse apologies and to plead guilty, guilty in ignorance; but an insult to his name is an insult which no man can forgive, and there was no mistaking Colonel Arnott's reference to a jellyfish. However, Jelliboff could not quarrel publicly with his host, so he said, simply, briefly, quietly and clearly, "I am sorry, sir," and without a word of extenuation reined back his horse, retiring from the limelight into the crepuscule; but his retirement was no abject retreat, and he came to a stand just short of the ranks of farmers on their cobs and children on their ponies.

The whippers-in got the pack together again, and the business of finding a fox started afresh; but Jelliboff's unfortunate error seemed to have cast a blight upon the day, and there was no other good run, and hounds made no kill. Jelliboff stayed tenaciously until the end, keeping himself and Victor (no mean feat) well in the background, and incidentally learning a good deal more about fox-hunting than he had known before.

Jogging home, he passed at a little distance a group of riders composed of Colonel Arnott, Alison and Gervaise Gaunt, and clearly on the faintly frosty air came a little speech of Gaunt's.

"I'm afraid Jelliboff spoiled your day, Colonel," he said.

"But it's partly my fault. I shouldn't have lent him such a fast horse! It didn't occur to me he'd be fool enough to ride over hounds. I suppose there's no knowing what a foreigner will do."

"Hush! He'll hear you," said Alison, little thinking that that was what Gaunt intended; that he wished to show Jelliboff how much of an outsider he was among English sporting gentry of the English countryside, and how strong were the seemingly cobweb threads that bound such together.

The day's events had in reality injured Jelliboff very little in Alison's estimation; he had shown himself an excellent horseman, and he had behaved with dignity in an impossible situation; and she was far from accusing him of having wilfully set out to annoy her father.

Parting with Victor at Gaunt's stable-door, Jelliboff gave him an affectionate slap on the buttock.

"He is a good horse," he said to the groom. "In spite of his bullet-head and his hard mouth, his little pig's eyes and his swishing tail, and in spite of his colour, he is a good horse. He is as hard as nails, as swift as the wind, and as comfortable as a fireside chair."

On the following Monday morning Alison was returning from a shopping expedition in the village, and saw Jelliboff in his orchard, sawing up an old tree. She reined in, and spoke to him over the fence; for, as usual, she was on horseback. Horses were cheaper and easier than cars on a country estate in those days, and Colonel Arnott would never have held up his head more if once his daughter had been seen upon a bicycle.

"Good morning, Colonel Jelliboff," she said, and added, with some shyness and indicating his work with her crop, "are you practising philosophy, like Tolstoy?"

"No, Miss Alison," he replied. "I am augmenting my fuel ration." He climbed over the fence and stood beside her. "The only philosophy I know is that of licking the boots of necessity," he said. "Either when my country decides that it has no further use for me, or when I myself make a *gaffe* and offend those whom I would most wish to honour—as on Saturday last."

Alison's heart beat a little faster at the words "whom I would most wish to honour," and she said warmly, "I was sure you didn't mean to offend us—I mean my father and the rest of them."

"That I did not. Nor you either." He seized her hand, kissed it and let it go, all before she had time to wonder what she ought to feel about this. "I would not willingly offend a hair of your head; which makes my conduct on Saturday the more reprehensible."

"Why did you do it?" she asked. "What made you ride over hounds in that way?"

"Ignorance, M'am'selle," he replied. "A misconception of the principles of a hunt."

"Daddy is furious," she added. "I am very much afraid he won't ask you to hunt again."

"I cannot expect that he should," replied Jelliboff. "I ruined his sport for him."

"But you wouldn't make the same mistake a second time."

"Unfortunately it is given to few of us to have the opportunity of not making the same mistake a second time."

"No; but it wasn't your fault."

He gave her a mournful look, and was silent, reflecting that some at least of the blame could be laid to his account, to what he now considered to have been a childish desire to show off his prowess.

"I am so sorry!" said Alison lamely, misinterpreting his look.

"No, do not be sorry, M'am'selle!" he exclaimed. "None of the fault was yours, and there is nothing for you to be sorry for, especially as I feel you have generously forgiven my unforgivable behaviour."

He kissed her hand again, and this time she was quite certain of the pleasure it gave her.

An awkwardness fell between them; she made some excuse about getting home with her shopping; they said good-bye, and she set the cob trotting through the lodge-gates and along the winding carriageway up to the Manor. Her heart was singing as she went. That he had kissed her hand once might be only foreign courtesy; that he should kiss it twice within a few minutes must surely mean something more. She felt, rather than reasoned, that she was loved as well as loving, and the November landscape brightened as if a moment of spring had warmed it. The chirruping of the blue-tits in the threadbare hedges sounded as joyous as the twittering of greenfinches in May; and the short trilling of the larks and the harsh tizzicking of the wagtails as they flew over from one field to another were as triumphant as the mistle-thrush's February pæan.

That same morning, Sir Gervaise Gaunt received the following letter through the post:—

"Sir,

You have insulted me by causing me to insult my host. I therefore suggest that you might like to meet me, at any time and place, and with any weapon, which you choose to name.

You may think this a foreign, barbarous and perhaps old-fashioned method of arbitration; but since our quarrel has no remedy, I believe, in any court of law, I submit that this method is as satisfactory as any."

The letter was signed "Your obedient servant, Paul Andrew Jelliboff"; and it showed Gaunt that Jelliboff understood the nature of the issue between them, and understood also that whatever other aiders and abettors there might be, it was Gaunt who was his real enemy.

Gaunt went to Major

Grampian for advice, like any subaltern. The Major groaned inwardly, but aloud he said, "Well, what do you want me to say? You've asked for it."

"Isn't there any other way out of it?" asked Gaunt.

"You might—er—beg his pardon," replied the Major, rubbing his nose.

"What!" shouted Gaunt.

"Well, then, you know as well as I do what you must do."

"But it's ridiculous!" grumbled Gaunt. "Am I to stand there on a cold morning dithering in my shirt, to be potted at and to pot? I shall look a perfect fool."

"Since you made a fool *of* him, I don't see that you can reasonably object to being made a fool of *by* him," remarked Grampian.

"You can't suggest anything else, then?"

"No, Gaunt. You must meet him—or have him call you names which perhaps you might not quite like."

During the rest of that day there was a voluminous interchange of notes between Gaunt Place, Farm Cottage and "Overlands." The time was fixed for seven the next morning; the place, a clearing at the top of a wood on Gaunt's estates; the weapons, Service revolvers. Captain Hope was to be Sir Gervaise's second, and Major Grampian agreed to be Jelliboff's; Harry Foster was to be there as supernumerary, mainly as look-out and partly as odd-job man. The morning proved frosty, and the fallen leaves were fringed with rime. At that hour the light still held a grey quality, in which objects yet stood out with an odd distinctness, while in the fields below were streaks of fog, as clearly defined as tongues of land reaching out into a lake. The sky above was clear but almost colourless, of a pale pearly blue or opalescent grey.

The three officers had arrived in Grampian's wheezing car; Jelliboff had walked. Preliminaries being over, Hope and Grampian marked out a range at which it was thought impossible for either combatant to do much damage to the other. "And for heaven's sake remember that if there's any killing, it's homicide, and probably murder," growled Grampian.

The handkerchief dropped; Jelliboff raised the barrel of his gun and deliberately fired into the air; and almost at the same instant reeled back a couple of paces, clutching his shoulder.

"Oh, the devil!" said Grampian, running towards him. Jelliboff, however, was not much hurt, the bullet having entered at the base of the neck, just above the left collar-bone. A hasty pad was made to check bleeding, and he was eased into his coat.

"Quick! Into the car, all of you," urged Grampian. "If the shots were heard, and we meet anybody, we're done."

As they descended through the wood, trying to hurry and yet not to make too much noise on the snapping twigs and

crunching leaves, he added, "Old Carlton will patch you up, sir. That'll be more discreet than either a hospital or a local practitioner."

"Old Carlton" was Major Carlton, the M.O. of the Unit, who barked out a "Now what's all this?" when he appeared on the scene, not best pleased at being called out to attend to blood and wounds before eight o'clock on a November morning.

"Oh! The usual foolish story," replied Grampian. "Cleaning a loaded gun, and all that."

"What, with the bullet entering at this angle?" demanded Carlton, who was now examining the wound. "Not unless Colonel Jelliboff cleans guns with his hands on a level with his chin."

"Perhaps I didn't make myself clear," said Grampian unblushingly. "It was Huffam who was cleaning the gun."

Major Carlton gave Major Grampian a long look, and said at the end of it, "Do you take me for a doctor of Marines, or what?"

He dug out the bullet, cleansed and bandaged the wound, and told Jelliboff to go home and keep quiet for a day or two.

"I'll run you up," said Grampian. "You can't walk that distance."

Jelliboff did not object. He was by this time looking green, but managed to hold up until he was alone with Huffam at Farm Cottage.

Sir Gervaise again sought counsel from Major Grampian.

"What the devil is to be done now?" said he.

"How do you mean?" inquired the Major, who could think of nothing "to be done now" except that the late antagonists should shake hands and be friends.

"I've a good mind to make him fight again," said Gaunt. The Major stared; and Sir Gervaise went on, "Dam' feller put me in the wrong again, firing into the air like that. I'm not satisfied."

"For the Lord's sake!" exclaimed the exasperated Major, "go home and thank your stars he did fire into the air. He'd probably have killed you if he hadn't—and then you'd 've had to be satisfied."

"I can't and I won't beg his pardon," said Gaunt.

"Who said you should?" demanded the Major, with knit brow. "You ought to bury the hatchet, though. Can't you send him a present of game or something, with a nice note? I dare say a brace of pheasants wouldn't come amiss in his larder."

Gaunt frowning and looking sulky, the Major continued, rather drily: "After all, you were as much at liberty to fire into the air as he was. He's too generous for you, and that's the truth. You know it, and you're sore about it, and you won't admit either; but none of these reasons is sufficient for another duel, that I can see. Besides, he might do the same again; on the other hand, he might say, 'Since he wants it, let him

have it,' and he might land you a bullet in your guts. Seems a dam'-fool idea to me."

"I deny the generosity," said Gaunt. "All he wanted was to stand well with Alison, if she heard about it."

"All right," said the Major. "Have it that way, if you like; and that being so, why don't you make it up and stand well with Alison yourself?"

Sir Gervaise seemed much struck with this view of the matter, and a few days later a pair of pheasants found their way to Jelliboff's front door, in the hands of a groom. But instead of the "nice note" recommended by Major Grampian they were accompanied by an ambiguous message which read: "Sir Gervaise Gaunt presents his compliments to Prince Jelliboff, and begs to inform him that the two pheasants were not brought down by firing into the air."

"Which, being interpreted," said Jelliboff to himself after pondering the message, "surely means that it was I who missed the target. What was my target? Or, rather, what is it that Sir Gervaise will conclude to have been my target? Alison, I suppose. Therefore I am to presume that although he has sent me an olive branch, he has not attached the white flag of truce to it." He would here have shrugged his shoulders, if this had not been too painful a mode of expressing himself. "Well, let him do what he pleases. I take it the pheasants are for the public, the note for my private, eye. *Eh bien!* If you intend to continue the fray, Sir Gervaise, so will I. And after all, my friend, Miss Alison is outside the pale for no man; only Lady Gaunt could be that."

He made a direct formal application to Colonel Arnott for Alison's hand, and received a point-blank refusal. Going over the scene afterwards with Mrs Hardy, Colonel Arnott said, "I suppose I can't exactly force Alison to marry Gervaise Gaunt, but by God! I can see to it she doesn't marry that damned foreign Catholic Salvation Army Colonel!"

He had yet to learn the lesson, so simple and yet seemingly so difficult of assimilation, especially where there is a strong love, that if we wish to please people, we must please them in the way in which they want to be pleased, and not in the way in which we think they ought to be pleased. Mrs Hardy sighed; she thought privately that Jelliboff and Alison were well matched, and she saw things, little delicate things, that the heavier-footed Colonel missed, as a fairy might see a rainbow in the dew upon the gossamer which the bovine tribe would trample before it could observe.

Alison was miserable. Insubstantial, unsubstantiated rumours concerning both the hunt and the duel reached her ears, and she now despised Gervaise Gaunt more heartily than ever she had despised either Harry Foster or Captain

Hope. She became irritable and impatient with him; yet an inexperienced loyalty towards their implicit engagement held her in invisible shackles, and she distrusted her own courage, uncertain how far she would be able to withstand her father and her aggressively exacting lover. She saw little of Jelliboff during these cheerless days, except at the Vicarage; for at the Manor he was no longer a welcome guest; yet it was he who in the end cut the Gordian knot for her, with one of his swift decisions, which he implemented with characteristic energy; and Colonel Arnott came down to breakfast one morning in March to find, instead of his daughter in her usual stance by the window, a note for him propped up against the coffee-pot on the table.

He might have been expected to storm and swear; to madden and to rage; but no—he went to stand, very quiet and very still, where Alison usually stood when waiting for him, looking out into the garden. Winter was almost over, spring disclosing a more on-coming disposition. He saw the snowdrops in the grass, and thought of his daughter; he saw a wren under a rhododendron bush, and thought of his daughter; he saw a glean of sunshine rapidly extinguished by a flying cloud, and thought of his daughter. He felt as lusty summer must feel at the approach of winter, when with a sad autumnal resignation it allows itself to submit to the inevitable gripping frost, searching wind and deadening, all-enveloping rain. He felt for the moment as he would have felt for ever if she had died, and for the moment the quiet and peace of accepted negation were his.

By-and-by, he took his problem to Mrs Hardy. Without a word he gave her the letter to read, and without a word she read it carefully through. Slowly folding it up, she said at last, "You know, Colonel, I really don't think Alison will come to much harm through Prince Jelliboff."

"No!" said the Colonel, biting his moustache. "I had half a mind to fetch her back."

"No; I shouldn't do that," said Mrs Hardy. "That would make the scandal worse. Just intimate that you don't intend to interfere. Who are these people, this General and Mrs Brocklehurst that he's arranged for her to stay with? Do you know anything about them?"

"Elderly; decent enough people, I believe," replied the Colonel grudgingly. "Brocklehurst's just retired."

"And she says that Paul . . ."

"Paul!" snorted the Colonel.

". . . is staying at an hotel in London. It doesn't seem so very improper, does it?"

"But the man's a Catholic," said the Colonel.

"That is a difficulty, certainly, but it is one that others have overcome before this. She says they're to be married by special licence from Walling church, and General Brocklehurst is to give her away. No

doubt the Prince will want to be married again, from his own church, or from a registry office; but I can't see that that will be any great detriment to Alison."

"A penniless pen-pusher!" said the Colonel.

"A disinherited knight!" said Mrs Hardy.

"A feller that can't tell one end of a fox from another!" complained the Colonel.

"He can learn," said Mrs Hardy; "with you and Alison to teach him. If they go on living at Farm Cottage, what could be handier?"

"No!" exploded the Colonel. "She need never show her face at the Manor again—unless, of course, that scoundrel lets her down. She'd be welcome, then."

Mrs Hardy coughed to hide a smile: she thought the Colonel would not long remain adamantine, at least towards his daughter; toleration of Jelliboff himself might be of tardier growth, and cordiality perhaps never even germinate. Suddenly the Colonel exclaimed, with a sort of rueful admiration, "Never thought she had it in her!"

"I should think you must be rather glad that she has," said Mrs Hardy sturdily. "Because a girl is sweet-tempered is not to say she has no individuality; nor that she is without a core, because she is malleable."

Since the only way to still scandalised tongues when two people suddenly disappear is to tell the truth, the news soon got abroad; and a day or two after it had become common knowledge, while Captain Hope was at work with Colonel Bridges in the latter's office, the Captain attracted his commanding officer's attention by a sudden "Colonel Bridges, sir!"

"Well?" said Bridges.

"You wouldn't like to buy Gaunt's Victor, would you?"

"No," said Bridges. "I should not."

"But you know, sir, I do really think you should!" said Hope.

"Why? What should I do with a horse like Victor, at my age?—a hard, wicked devil, if ever there was one."

"Sell him again, sir," replied Hope promptly.

"What *is* this? Are you mad, or drunk, or both?"

"Neither, sir. The fact is, I—we—want to buy Victor ourselves, but Gaunt might smell a rat if we approached him. If you do it, he won't; and I don't think he's very fond of Victor just now."

"If you'd have the grace to explain . . .!" said Bridges.

Hope explained. Colonel Bridges first stared, then grinned, and finally gave the scheme his blessing.

When Jelliboff and his bride came out of East Walling Church they were greeted by a little burst of military music. Six musicians of the *n*th A.A. Group stood on either side of the path to the gate, and between them was Sergeant-Major Dickens in full regimentals, holding a chestnut horse by the bridle. The animal was furnished with a

complete new set of saddlery; his bridle was adorned with rosettes in the colours of the *n*th A.A. Group and in those of Jelliboff's own late regiment; his coat had been groomed until it shone like burnished copper, and his hooves polished until they were as bright as an old-fashioned kitchen's black-leaded grate; only his mane, unfortunately and irremediably hogged, spoiled his appearance. Pinned to his saddle was a note: "To Colonel Prince Jelliboff, on the occasion of his wedding; with the compliments and congratulations of the officers of the *n*th A.A. Group." There followed a list of signatures, beginning with that of Colonel Bridges and ending with that of Mr Foster. There was no reference to Sir Gervaise, nor did his signature appear among the others.

"For a gift of this nature," said Jelliboff to Alison, "there is only one suitable acknowledgment."

He turned, and conferred a moment with General Brocklehurst. Messengers were set in motion; the General and his wife got into their car, which then drove away from the gate and disappeared; then a choir-girl's purple robe was brought out from the vestry and folded round Alison's white brocade gown. The curiosity of the villagers, crowding along the churchyard wall, was like the working of yeast on a warm hearth. Presently it was rewarded by the amazing spectacle of a gentleman in immaculate morning-dress flinging himself across the horse's back; next, his bride raised one foot and placed it on his as it rested in the stirrup; they grasped hands; the bride gave a spring and the groom gave a heave; someone from behind gave a shove, and the Princess Jelliboff was seated on the horse's crupper behind her husband, with her arm round his waist. Sergeant-Major Dickens released his hold on the bridle; and in this wise the newly wedded couple rode slowly, and with only a few minor *jeux-d'esprit* on Victor's part, the short half-mile or so between the church and the General's house. The Sergeant-Major, the musicians, and the villagers, being regaled with beer at Jelliboff's expense, stored up this bridal in their imaginations as the germ of incredible legends for future narration; and the version that eventually delighted the Officers' Mess at "Overlands" was a veritable Young Lochinvar affair, dashing, colourful, and romantic.

COMMENT.

DURING August the international climate, like the British weather, was unsettled. Much vague talk of peace was unaccompanied by deeds. At Kaesong the delegates continued to haggle about a 'Cease fire,' the point chiefly in dispute being whether the opposing forces should stay approximately where they are or the line of demarcation should be the old artificial frontier of the 38th Parallel. The United Nations, having established themselves in defensible positions, most of which lie a little to the north of the Parallel, do not see the point of abandoning them, while the Chinese are evidently afraid that by giving away ground they may lose 'face.' The indications still are that while Communist headquarters does not want the negotiations to be called off, they will argue every inch of the way to the point of exhaustion.

Meanwhile 'Pravda' has published an article by Mr Morrison; some Quakers have been visiting Moscow and talking to Mr Malik; the Supreme Soviet has passed a resolution on Russo-American relations; and Mr Gromyko is attending the Japanese Peace Conference at San Francisco.

In all this only an incorrigible optimist will detect any signs of a genuine change of heart. The more suspicious-minded—and by this time most people in the Western countries have suspicious minds—are more likely to draw a different conclusion. This is that the Kremlin, impressed by the growing weight of the armaments of the free nations, is hoping to persuade other people besides Mr Bevan that it is all rather unnecessary. No one knows better than Mr Stalin that if a halt to rearmament were to be called now, any future resumption would be very difficult. In other words, to start at all was an achievement, but to start again after stopping would require something like a miracle.

From Persia the news was at first more promising. After that leading dollar-bearing security, Mr Averell Harriman, had prepared the ground, Mr Richard Stokes paid his visit. But although at one time it looked as though the upshot might be a settlement, the negotiations broke down and Mr Stokes came home empty-handed. Diplomacy in the East is full of hitches; Dr Moussadek has talked his people into a thoroughly uncompromising frame of mind; and when the Persians do not like something that is happening, they have a nasty habit of assassination. So the deadlock continues.

Mr Gaitskell's announcement of the intention to freeze dividends added nothing to the credit of the Government. He had begun with an impeccable description of the nation's economic troubles, pointing out that the tide, which had been

running strongly in our favour, had turned with the Korean war and the necessity for re-armament. Not only was an inflationary movement more marked than it had ever been, but the balance of trade was tipping against us once more. So far so good—or so bad. But Mr Gaitskell is like a doctor who, after making an accurate and skilful diagnosis, is unable or unwilling to prescribe a proper remedy. Such a state of affairs is always disappointing to a patient, who is interested to know what is the matter with him, but still more interested to be told how he is to be cured. The Chancellor's single constructive suggestion was a freezing of dividends, which will be about as effective a remedy as a piece of sticking-plaster applied to a gaping wound. It will, no doubt, reduce the purchasing power of a number of people who hold Ordinary shares in certain Companies; but the great majority of such persons are not millionaires or 'spivs' or reckless spenders, but citizens of moderate means and decent habits who happen to have invested their money, quite legitimately, in this particular way. The argument—so far as there is an argument—is that you cannot expect the Trade Unions to consent to a standstill in wages unless this is accompanied by an equivalent standstill in dividends. If wages had ever in fact been frozen, or if there was the least likelihood even now of their being kept at their present level, there would be something in the argument. But everyone is aware that even in the days of the utmost stringency, when Sir Stafford Cripps was reading his most solemn homilies, wage increases were happening; they are still happening; and they will go on happening.

What Mr Gaitskell prefers to ignore is that during five years, when rises in wages, albeit discouraged and checked whenever possible, were taking place, nearly all the larger Companies were voluntarily restricting their dividends. This year, when a considerable further unfreezing of wages had occurred, some Companies raised their dividends. The rises were not excessive, and, under the terms of the Budget, brought considerable revenue to the Treasury as well as some relief to the shareholders. Almost the worst part of Mr Gaitskell's new policy is that those who have helped the Government will be penalised and those who have been less co-operative will be practically unaffected. Companies which responded to the appeals of the Treasury and neither raised their dividends nor established headquarters overseas will be hit; those which did not respond will in a negative sense be rewarded. A better example of punishing those who have helped you and encouraging those who have not could hardly be devised.

If the policy—inequitable and illogical as it is—were really going to get the country out of its difficulties, something might be said for it. But it goes nowhere near the root of the problem of inflation. It does

not touch the swollen expenditure of Government departments. So short is the political memory that some of the blatant extravagances of the last few years are already half forgotten. *Ou sont les neiges d'antan?* Where are the ground-nuts of Tanganyika or the eggs of Gambia? If to recall them is to impose too great a strain upon Ministerial memories, at least let the spending departments cast an eye over their accounts. Can anyone put his hand on his heart and vow that Mr Bevan's National Health Service has been conducted with due economy, or Mr Webb's Food Ministry, or Mr Tomlinson's educational programme? Cannot Mr Dalton plan our country and our towns a little less expensively—just for the moment at any rate? Could not the Minister of Works stop multiplying his Staff and increasing his office accommodation—for a year or so anyhow?

In fact, could not all these spending Ministers pause and reflect that Governments are not so very unlike individuals? Mr Brown may want to redecorate his house or to buy a new car; he may have the most excellent reasons for doing either or both; but if he cannot afford the bills, he will, if he is wise, manage for a little longer with the old car and the old wallpaper. He may even find that if he is to stay solvent, he must sell the old car and move into a smaller house. It is a great pity, but if he is to provide food and clothing for himself and his family, he must economise.

Such a line of reasoning is of course infinitely offensive to our present Ministers; and the need to avoid it is largely responsible for the shifts and evasions to which they resort. Behind Mr Gaitskell's pronouncement lay an awkward political fact. The Socialist Party was split over the Budget. The division has been more obvious in the country than in Parliament, where the departing Ministers, having raised the standard of revolt, withdrew to their tents to brood over their own virtue. But in the country it was different. A great many people believed that Mr Bevan was right and Mr Gaitskell wrong; and there is a prospect of some very plain speaking when the Party meets at Scarborough in October.

Meanwhile the Parliamentary rebels, like Hitler, have written a book. It was neither very sensible nor very helpful, but at least it professed to contain some sort of policy for a Government with a majority of six and a General Election in the offing. Who could tell what would happen at Scarborough if the debate were between what seemed to be a policy and what was unquestionably the absence of a policy? But there was a way out, Mr Disraeli's old plan of catching the Whigs bathing and going off with their clothes. Mr Gaitskell did not treat Mr Bevan quite so ruthlessly as Disraeli treated the Whigs. He merely stole Mr Bevan's vest—if the freezing of dividends may be so described; and at Scarborough the Chancellor will appear proudly in this garment,

supplemented perhaps by one or two other articles of clothing he is able to borrow or steal in the interval. No doubt Mr Bevan will not mind too much, because his cupboards are stocked with the sort of wear that goes down well at a Party meeting.

In short, the freezing of dividends was a piece of Party tactics, designed to gratify the malice of the baser sort of Socialists, who will always find consolation in the adversity of others; to produce the appearance of a solution for the country's economic ills; to take some of the wind out of Mr Bevan's sails; and to provide a slogan for the next General Election. Mr Gaitskell has done his best to dissipate any repute his Budget may have won him last April.

Mr Dalton's contribution to the incident is by comparison hardly worth mentioning. The Chancellor's announcement was followed by a heavy fall on the Stock Exchange. A lot of people, and especially those who had recently invested in Ordinary shares, having lost (at least on paper and possibly only for the moment) a lot of money, Mr Dalton remarked that the whole disturbance was "good fun." No doubt he tempered his amusement with regret that he had not thought of this particular joke when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer; and no doubt the victims tempered their annoyance with satisfaction that some years ago an indiscretion deprived the Treasury of Mr Dalton's services.

American opinion has been shocked by the news that ninety out of the 2520 cadets at West Point have been dismissed for cheating. Americans are rightly proud of the Military Academy. It carries the chief responsibility for training the future officers of their Army and should have much of the credit for the notable success with which regimental and staff officers were found in the phenomenal expansion of the armed services during the war. Anything that touches the honour of West Point is therefore keenly felt. On the other hand, the sentence of a "general discharge" sounds severe for an offence by no means unknown in the public schools of this country and there dealt with, as a rule, by some lesser punishment than expulsion. The scale of the purge, too, suggests that at West Point the practice was systematic and of long standing. If so, the delinquents were not so much exceptional as very unlucky.

It seems, further, that the dismissals will practically destroy the Academy's football team. Anyone who has ever visited an American university or college must have noticed the undue prominence of athletics, which rank higher there than in any British public school. If a boy is a promising athlete, his scholastic attainments matter little; and the football coach is a more important member of the staff than is any learned professor. What seems to have happened is that West Point collected a team which, while likely to put the Naval Academy at Anna-

polis in its proper place, contained a number of boys who were allergic to examinations. For the sake of the side they had to be kept; and the result was the recent incident, which is not very different from other recent incidents in other places of learning in the United States. So serious is the position that Senator Fulbright, an old Rhodes scholar, has been urging that until West Point and Annapolis have put their houses in order and games in the right perspective, inter-collegiate football matches should be discontinued.

At West Point the position has been complicated by the honour system. This is a hundred and fifty years old, and by it every cadet is bound not only to observe certain rules himself, but to report any breach of them by his comrades. A British boy, who might be persuaded, however reluctantly, to accept the first clause, would regard the practice of the second as odious and indistinguishable from "sneaking"; and a young American would probably feel the same way. At any rate, the authorities were asking for trouble when they gave the same examination papers to different groups of cadets on different days, trusting that the honour system would prevent any leakage.

The authorities, in fact, seem to be at least as much to blame as were the cadets, with whom considerable sympathy has been expressed. While a "general discharge" is not necessarily discreditable, its effect is much the same as that of expulsion. For most if not all of the cadets concerned it will end any idea of a career in the army; and few would wish to slam the door on a boy for something which is possibly less his fault than that of the system.

Meanwhile the Republicans in Washington are trying to use the unhappy business for their own ends. What can you expect, they ask, when so bad an example is being set in high places? They are evidently hopeful that with a little luck this storm in a teacup might become another storm in the Teapot Dome. With a Presidential Election coming next year, almost anything will serve if it appears to blacken the record of the Administration. The exchange of amiable personalities has already grown sharper. "None of these troubles would have happened," the Republicans are saying, "if only President Truman were alive." And again, "Isn't it a pity," they remark, "that the President should hold the whole future of the country in the hollow of his head?" To this the Democrats, after some thought, retorted a little lamely, "Isn't it a pity that Senator Taft should have been born with a silver foot in his mouth?"

News from the Ivory Coast of Africa indicates a new occupational hazard for politicians. M. Victor Biakaboda is or was the representative of that colonial territory in the French Senate. In June he was attend-

ing to his senatorial duties in Paris, returning in the Recess to his constituency. One day he went for a motor drive in the jungle. He did not come back. The weeks went by and still he was missing. Then the remains of a skull were discovered, examined by experts, and reported as likely to be M. Biakaboda's. Whereupon, with some cause, the missing Senator's two wives combined to demand a public inquiry.

Now the grim probability seems to be that the missing Senator has been eaten by his constituents. "I firmly believe," an official has stated, "that he has been eaten. When cannibalism occurs," he went on to say, "it is generally because the victim has been connected with a West African secret society."

That may be, but certain reflections are unavoidable. M. Biakaboda was a member of the African Democratic Rally, a body with strong Communist associations. The President of the Rally has declared his certainty that the Senator is dead, without suggesting how. Is the missing man perhaps the victim of a deviationist group on the Ivory Coast, of a body of African Titoists? Was he himself a crypto-deviationist or a potential Tito, brought to judgment by his more orthodox constituents? Even this would not explain the original method of liquidation employed. There are various ways in which discontented electors are wont to deal with their representative. They can shout him down or throw eggs and tomatoes at him; they can beat him up; in lawless lands they have even been known to shoot him. But so far as can be ascertained, never before have they eaten him.

Can it be, on the other hand, that the 'Fascist hyena,' who figures so often in Communist speeches, has at last materialised? We do now know. 'Pravda' has not yet spoken; and until the party line on this grisly business has been given, conjecture is a little unsafe. At least it is unsafe for Communists.

The disappearance has produced another problem. When a man is eaten, the evidence of his death is not at all satisfactory. The remains—to put it delicately—have been dissipated. The portion of the skull that has been found may be M. Biakaboda's or may not. There is no certainty; and until there is, the vacancy in the Senate cannot be filled. No body, no by-election. At any rate there can be none until death is proved, and for obvious reasons the only possible witnesses are not likely to be communicative. But unless death can be proved, under a peculiar provision of the French Constitution, the seat may remain vacant for thirty years. Here, then, is another baffling puzzle resulting from this unusual incident.

As one massive volume followed another of Mr Garvin's Life of Joseph Chamberlain, the reviewer's favourite adjective

was monumental. Had the task ever been completed, Mr Garvin would probably have been able to claim authorship of the longest biography in the English language. But the task was never completed. It outlived the energy or patience even of the author who, having brought his story up to the South African War, laid down his pen and never wrote another word with it. For years the Life remained unfinished, a silent reminder that brevity, if not the soul of biography, is at least advisable if a book is ever to be done. And then Mr Julian Amery took up the pen which Mr Garvin had thrown aside.[1]

The choice of a successor was both hereditary and happy. Mr Amery is not only a skilful and talented writer, but is the son of the man who nearly forty years ago was the first choice to be the biographer of Chamberlain. Mr Leo Amery, who has guarded Chamberlain's memory so jealously and his faith so loyally, must today be proud of and satisfied with the work of his son.

Mr Julian Amery has worked under one serious limitation. He did not begin the book: he is merely ending it. He cannot therefore jettison Mr Garvin's original plan. He may not even alter greatly the scale: the most he can do is to make two volumes where Mr Garvin would surely have made three.

The volume which has just appeared carries Mr Chamberlain through the South African War, nearly to the end of his Colonial Secretaryship, and to the beginning of his campaign for Tariff Reform. Some may consider the length even now disproportionate to the man—to any man, and especially to one who never rose to be Prime Minister and whose highest post was the Colonial Office. Yet the period Chamberlain may be said to span and the influence he wielded throughout it were immense. He was born the year before Queen Victoria came to the throne and his widow is alive today. In 1880 he was the likeliest heir to the leadership of the Liberal Party; and fifty-seven years later one of his sons became Prime Minister, another of his sons having already been Foreign Secretary. Joseph Chamberlain set a stamp on his times which still endures. In the seventies of the last century he was talking of social reforms, some of which Mr Lloyd George was to carry out between 1908 and 1914, while others his son Neville achieved in the nineteen-twenties. He was the first to formulate a genuine Imperial policy and to challenge with authority the economic orthodoxies of the Victorians; and today the younger Conservatives are repeating his arguments, while Labour Ministers are defending the Preferences for which he pleaded in vain. He was a pioneer and he was also a prophet; and although he was never Prime Minister,

[1] 'The Life of Joseph Chamberlain.' Vol. IV. (1901-1903). By Julian Amery. (Macmillan.)

he was the foremost British statesman of his day.

In this volume Mr Amery shows us Chamberlain during the difficult years after Paardeberg and the march to Pretoria, through the recurring set-backs and disappointments of a war which most people had erroneously decided was over. Chamberlain's determination never flagged. He was resolved to fight on to unqualified victory and then to make peace with magnanimity. He did both. Perhaps the most illuminating of Mr Amery's chapters are those in which he describes Chamberlain's visit to South Africa in 1902. To the Boers he had been a veritable bugbear, the man who had started the war and stolen their country. Yet he won their reluctant esteem without forfeiting the enthusiastic affection of the British South Africans, and left behind him a promise of reconciliation which was to be fulfilled a few years later. The credit for self-government is usually given to Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman, that of Union to 'Milner's young men,' to Botha and to Smuts; but the foundations were laid on Chamberlain's journey. Union was his purpose throughout.

His prestige was extraordinary and his activity was pervasive. It was he who made the memorable advance to Germany, which Bulow had the folly to rebuff, to the ruin of world peace and of his master's dynasty. Chamberlain's finger was in everything; for he never allowed himself to be confined within the borders of the Colonial Office. Had he so wished he might, when old Lord Salisbury retired, have disputed the succession with Arthur Balfour. But Chamberlain was determined that there should be no rivalry and gave Balfour his unstinted support. He knew only too well that the Palace, the Church, the Treasury, and the inner ring of the Conservative Party were all against him, and he was not the man to divide the Government on a personal issue. We may speculate on what might have been if Chamberlain and not Balfour had followed Salisbury; or if, with the change of Prime Ministers, Chamberlain had left the Colonial Office and gone, as many hoped he would go, to the Exchequer. He might and probably would have failed to convert his fellow-countrymen in a year or two to his new fiscal views, and he would certainly have failed to convert the Treasury; but at least he would have fought his battle on more favourable ground and the Election of 1906 would have been a defeat and not a *débacle*.

Irresistible forces were sweeping Chamberlain from Free Trade to Tariff Reform. The South African War had turned his thoughts to the question of the greater unity of the British Empire. He thought of a Staatsverein, a Kriegsverein, a Zollverein, but each expedient in turn was rejected by the Colonies, then in the first flush of nationhood. Only one road remained. The Colonies were

already allowing the Mother Country a Preference in their markets. This they were ready to enlarge if in return the Mother Country would agree to give them a reciprocal Preference. To make a start seemed simple enough. Already a small revenue duty had been put on imported corn, and all that was required was to leave this duty on the foreign import, but to exempt corn coming from the Colonies. It is true that Hicks Beach, the redoubtable Chancellor of the Exchequer, who carried an authority in financial circles such as only Gladstone had had before him, was hostile to the idea. But 'Black Michael' went with Salisbury, and his successor, Ritchie, was a smaller man. When Chamberlain sailed for South Africa he believed he had won his fight in the Cabinet, but when he returned a few months later he found that the decision had been reversed. The duty came off and the campaign for Imperial Preference had to start from the beginning.

Other handicaps were Balfour's Education Bill, which alienated most of Chamberlain's Nonconformist supporters, and Chinese Labour on the Rand, unscrupulously exploited by the Opposition. Nor had Chamberlain the vigour of earlier days. In 1903 he was sixty-six and a serious accident had visibly aged him. "He is too old—too old," murmured Milner when the new policy was propounded to him. "He is wonderful for his age, but this task is bigger than he realises." So this latest volume ends.

Mr Amery's portrait is more sympathetic—in effect, though not in intention—than Mr Garvin's. Perhaps with age Chamberlain mellowed, became less hard and more human. He was far from the cold materialist of his adversaries' indictment. He was a lonely man. When he left the Liberal Party he lost his old friends, and he was not one to make new friends easily. He was never quite at home in the Hotel Cecil and no one replaced Dilke and Morley. He had his son Austen, a model of filial devotion, and Jesse Collings, whom the cartoonists loved to depict as Sancho Panza; but Collings, though counting for something in Birmingham, had little weight at Westminster. Among the younger men Chamberlain had his disciples, but these were not intimates; and among men of every age he had bitter enemies, who feared even more than they hated him. In those last years he would have been happier and might even have achieved more if he had hit less hard in the days of his youth and strength.

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